

**SAFEGUARDING PRESSURES PHASE 4**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**NOVEMBER 2014**

**1. Introduction**

ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research has collected and compared current and trend analysis of both qualitative and quantitative information from local authorities in four phases spanning 2007/8 to 2013/14, as well as horizon scanning into the coming two to three years. Through each phase, significant increases in safeguarding activity have been reported together with the range of factors contributing to this, and the predicted continued growth has happened. The challenges and effects of policy, social, economic and demographic factors look very much the same as they did four years ago - when Phases 1 and 2 of this research were published - despite, as shown in this most recent Phase 4 of the research, evidence based actions by authorities to counteract these.

102 local authorities (67%) participated in Phase 4 providing information about volumes of and the factors behind safeguarding activities including the impact of early help. In addition, policy, legislative, social and economic factors which frame the ever more complex context in which safeguarding services are now planned and delivered were considered.

**2. Context**

The number of children and young people aged 0-17 in England has increased to 11.5 million according to ONS 2013 mid-year population estimates. The 0-17 population is projected to reach 12.5 million by 2036. In addition, many local authorities report changes in the profile and characteristics of their populations with a greater number of families in poverty - the highest population increases tend to be in areas of greatest deprivation (IDACI) - inward migration and complex family structures. These factors have impacted upon safeguarding activity and the provision of services to children. There is a correlation between the rates at which key safeguarding activity takes place (referrals, child protection plans and children looked after) and levels of deprivation.

Phase 3 reported a significant amount of new legislation, guidance and reviews which has continued to increase in the two years between Phase 3 and this current research, including Prof. Eileen Munro's review of child protection; the Family Justice Review; reforms to

adoption, the health service and welfare benefits; and latterly the Children and Families Act 2014. All of these things have had, and continue to have, a considerable impact on children's services according to respondents. In addition, there are new demands on local authority children's services such as Staying Put; implementation of Education Health and Care Plans; and the requirement for care proceedings to be completed within an average of 26 weeks. The unprecedented number of inquiries, reviews and investigations over the past few years, and the media attention which they generate, has provided a sharper focus on issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation and the way in which public institutions have dealt historically and contemporaneously with allegations of sexual abuse.

### **3. Key Findings**

#### **3.1 Early Help and 'The Front Door' to Children's Social Care**

76 authorities provided information about the services they provide to support children and families who do not meet the threshold for children's social care services, describing four broad models of early help which comprise any number of services, but most commonly health visiting, youth services and children's centres and some form of family working/co-ordinators:

- Separate services and links through local partnership arrangements
- Co-located multi-agency teams for higher tier screening, such as Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and a range of early help services
- Early help Hubs providing a single point of referral and service provision
- Integrated early help and safeguarding hubs, providing one referral point for early help and social care services.

79% of respondents reported that some universal and early help services, such as children's centres and youth services, were moving to more targeted intervention, or ceasing all together largely due to funding pressures.

Understanding the prevalence and impact of early help services nationally is difficult. There is evidenced that the Troubled Families initiative is having a positive effect, and responding authorities report wide variances in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) or Early Help Assessment (EHA). There has been an increase of 23% in the number of CAFs completed in responding authorities between 2012/13 and 2013/14, to a rate of 125 per 10,000 0-17 population.

There continues to be an increase in the number of initial contacts and referrals, to 1,142,861 contacts across 76 responding authorities (nationally this equates to 2.3 million initial contacts across all authorities). There were 392,775 referrals across 88 responding authorities in 2013/14 (nationally this equates to 660,500). 33.7% of contacts and 25.1% of

referrals are from Police, and Education was the next largest source. Abuse or Neglect (N1) continued to be the predominant and increasing reason for referrals (45.7% of all referrals).

56% of respondents felt that thresholds for children’s social care had not changed in the past two years in their authority, compared to 71% reporting no change in thresholds in Phase 3.

### 3.2 Children’s Social Care Activity

Activity	2011/12			2013/14				% change between 2011/12 and 2013/14	% change between 2007/8 and 2013/14
	LAs Respon-ded	Number	Rate <sup>1</sup>	LAs Respon-ded	Number	Rate <sup>1</sup>	Number extrapol-ated to all LAs		
Initial Contacts	69	960,941	1,853	76	1,142,861	2,021	2.3 million	9.0%	65%
Referrals	88	361,712	546	88	392,775	574	660,500	5.1%	21%
Becoming subject of CP Plan	106	37,546	46.5	95	37,388	50.8	58,700	9.7%	65%
Subject of a CP Plan at 31 Mar	106	30,860	39.2	96	31,448	42.6	49,000	8.6%	62%
Starting to be Looked After	103	21,431	26.4	97	20,638	28.0	32,200	6.3%	48%
Looked After at 31 Mar	104	47,111	58.3	100	47,554	61.7	69,000	4.7%	8%

<sup>1</sup>Rate per 10,000 0-17 population, using relevant ONS mid-year estimates.

The table above 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 continued rise in referrals, child protection plans and children looked after – in some cases, significant increases since ADCS started collecting this information in 2007/8. However, the variations in current rates and changes between local authorities are also significant with more authorities experiencing a reduction than previously. There does not appear to be any correlation across regions, types of authority or increases or reductions in numbers of children subjects of child protection plans or children looked after.

There is evidence of a 'revolving door' into children's social care generally, although there are variations between authorities. 23% of all referrals are 're-referrals' (second or subsequent referrals on a closed case within 12 months of the previous referral) and nationally, 16% of children becoming subjects of an initial child protection plan did so for a second or subsequent time (an increase on previously). Approximately 13% of children starting to be looked after in 2013/14 were re-entering care for the second or subsequent time according to the 73 authorities who provided data.

### **3.3 Children Subjects of Child Protection Plans**

Neglect remains the predominant category of abuse on initial child protection plans (42%) although the greatest increase has been in Emotional Abuse to 33.6% of all initial plans. This is most likely to be a reflection of the increase in cases where domestic abuse is a factor. There has also been an increase in the proportion of children who are subjects of child protection plans at 31 March 2014 for Emotional Abuse (42.1%). The most significant reduction is in the category of Sexual Abuse by -34.6%.

Between 2011/12 (Phase 3) and 2013/14, there has been an increase in children aged 5 to 9 who are both becoming subjects of a plan, and who are subjects of a plan at 31 March. Whilst the 16-17 age group remains the smallest (3% of all children subject of a CP plan at 31 March 2014), it has seen the largest increase proportionally – up by 28.1%.

### **3.4 Children Looked After**

There has been a 6.3% increase in the number of children starting to be looked after, a rate of 28 per 10,000 0-17 population. Two thirds of local authorities experienced an increase but a larger proportion than before are starting to see a reduction in the number of children starting to be looked after, as well as those who are looked after at 31 March. The number of children looked after accommodated under a series of short breaks (legal status code V3 or V4) is excluded from reported figures, but has more than halved in the two years since 2011/12.

Contributing factors to this reduction are likely to include the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, which provides more flexibility for overnight short breaks to be delivered under Section 17 rather than as looked after children; greater variety of short break types and funding; or a reduction due for other reason.

55.8% of children starting to be looked after, and 62.8% of children looked after at 31 March were due to Abuse or Neglect, the largest category of need of children looked after. The

largest increase has been Family Dysfunction which accounts for 16% of all children looked after at 31 March 2014. The continued reduction in Absent Parenting accords with falling numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

57.1% of all children starting to be looked after are aged under 10, but there is a growth in the proportion who are aged 5 to 9 or 16 and over. 14.5% of children starting to be looked after were aged 16 or 17, compared to 20.2% aged 16 or 17 who were looked after at 31 March 2014. Variances in the ages of children looked after between local authorities is marked.

Between 31 March 2012 and 2014, there was a 40% reduction in the proportion of children looked after subject of Interim Care Orders, and 12.9% reduction in children accommodated under Section 20. More children are subjects of Full Care Orders (21% increase) or Placement Orders (48.9% increase).

There has been little change in the proportions by placement types apart from an increase in children placed for adoption, from 3.8% at 31 March 2012 compared to 5.1% at 31 March 2014. The largest proportion of children looked after are placed with foster carers other than relatives or friends (63.2%). So, given that 20.2% of children looked after at 31 March are 16 or 17 years old (this equates to some 14,000 young people), the overwhelming majority of whom are in foster care placements, there will be a significant number of those young people looked after that become eligible for Staying Put support and services.

The indicator for long term stability of placements remains largely unchanged, with 64.4% of children looked after for 2.5 or more years in the same placement for at least the last two years.

There are relatively small changes over the two years between proportions leaving care by end reason, with returning home being the most common reason for leaving care (34.8%), although the proportion achieving permanence through either adoption, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Residence Order (RO) has increased from 21.3% to 32.9% between 2011/12 and 2013/14. There has also been an increase in the proportion sentenced to custody, from 1.5% to 2.2%, although absolute numbers remain low.

There were 957 children reported by authorities for whom the agency's decision to adopt had subsequently changed. The main reason (32.7%) was because 'prospective adopters could not be found' but there was also a significant increase from 6.8% in 2011/12 to 19.6% in 2013/14 where plans changed because 'the Court did not make a Placement Order'. There are some geographical variations.

The proportion of children ceasing to be looked after who were adopted has increased to 16.9% in 2013/14, and there are a greater proportion of children looked after for less than two years prior to leaving care (from 54% in 2011/12 to 59% in 2013/14). Quarterly voluntary adoption survey data for 2013/14 collected by the DfE, and more recently by the Adoption Leadership Board, shows that there were 6,000 children with a Placement Order waiting to be placed with an adopter as at 31 March 2013, which decreased by 24% to 4,550 at the end of 2013/14. There were also reductions in the number of new adoption decisions. The increase in proportion of children adopted and the improved timeliness of matching are positive and a testament to the hard work and tenacity of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies. But latest data on the reduction in the numbers of Placement Orders being made by courts, together with new case law (B-S judgement, July 2014) will have negative implications not only on the proportion and number of children in care adopted from 2014/15 onwards, but also for local authorities across the country who will have increasing numbers of Care Orders which will need to be re-visited for a permanency decision.

59 authorities provided information about Orders being funded at 31 March 2014, reporting an average rate of 12.4 SGOs and 7.3 ROs per 10,000 0-17 population. There has been a 29.7% increase in the number of SGOs being funded by responding authorities, which has put pressure on budgets so that 85% of authorities providing financial information had overspent on their SGO budget line, an overspend of approximately £18m.

### **3.5 Care Leavers and Adolescents**

In 2013/14, DfE captured new care leaver data to include care leavers aged 19, 20 or 21 year olds, reporting a total of 27,220 care leavers at 31 March 2014. Data collected by ADCS in Phase 4 evidenced a significant difference across authorities in their rates of care leavers. This combined with the variation in the rates of children currently looked after would suggest that the rates and differences between authorities in their number of care leavers will continue to grow. The impact of this on local authorities' financial resource to fund Staying Put, will be significant.

The numbers of adolescents, and specifically 16 and 17 year olds in both child protection and looked after services has continued to increase. More 16 and 17 year olds are starting to be looked after for socially unacceptable behaviour, disability or illness, and absent parenting than all ages but just under half are still looked after due to Abuse or Neglect. Homelessness was cited as a key change, although few authorities provided information of any significant numbers. 76% of respondents said that they had experienced changes in the needs of, or demands on service provision by adolescents. Most notable changes were an increase in children and young people who were missing or at risk of child sexual

exploitation (CSE); use of welfare secure or specialist residential care; and, finding appropriate placements for adolescents who are looked after.

### **3.6 Resources**

The planned expenditure on children's services including schools budget for 2013/14 across all 152 authorities in England was £50.4bn, of which £8.4bn was spent on children and young people's services and youth justice - £3.26bn for children looked after. For 2014/15, local authorities are budgeting for even more planned expenditure on children looked after, from within an overall budget reduced to £8.3bn. Reductions are planned in other areas such as Sure Start Children's Centres and Early Years, and Services for Young People, which will inevitable impact upon a range of service provision despite efforts to improve commissioning, share services or form consortia. For a limited number of authorities, there has been investment in early help and social care services, including 'invest to save' initiatives and workforce investment. New and emerging budget pressures such as Staying Put, implementing SEND reforms, funding reductions in other public and voluntary agencies and increased savings targets will have an impact in the future.

Key funding pressures reported in 2013/14 were funding Special Guardianship Orders and supporting families with no recourse to public funds, (27 authorities reported a spend of £17.5m supporting families with no recourse to public funds in 2013/14) with the greatest number in London and Core Cities, and expectations are of increased need from 2014/15 onwards).

76% of authorities reported changes to their social work staffing. For just under a third of authorities, this was through change as Members recognise the investment required in social work posts; through re-structuring, new models of working or shared services. For just over two thirds, there are recruitment and retention issues: high staff turnover, difficulty recruiting experienced social workers (often in the most needy teams such as referral and child protection), resulting in increased use of agency staff, together with an increase in newly qualified social workers.

## **4. Cause and Effect**

In 2013, Action for Children reported that across the UK, there had been 98 separate Acts of Parliament affecting children passed since 1987; and over 400 different initiatives, strategies, funding streams, legislation or guidance and organisational changes to services affecting children and young people over the past 21 years. Half of these were in the six years prior to 2013. There are further significant Acts of Parliament and changes expected in

the next two years whatever the outcome of the General Election. This is a significant amount of change for local children's services to manage effectively within the scope of the reported reduction in resources, management posts and infrastructure to deliver services. Responses from local authorities suggest a myriad of presenting issues which have contributed to changes in safeguarding activity.

Of the 76 authorities responding, the impact of early help ranged from 29 who reported a reduction in one or more safeguarding activity; 22 who had experienced an increase in one or more safeguarding activity (unmet need) and 25 where it was too soon to see any impact from their early help services, or they were still in development.

Other factors identified in Phase 3 continue, and some have both a positive and negative impact.

- Funding reductions: Impact is significant and this is likely to be a considerable factor going forward;
- Staying Put: availability of foster carers and funding of placements were cited as having an effect in the future, although recognised as a positive outcome for care leavers;
- "Toxic Trio" and family circumstances: nearly every authority stated that the prevalence of domestic abuse, parental mental health and parental substance misuse, as well as an increase in children who are 'beyond parental control' were significant presenting issues in assessment, child protection plans and reasons for children starting to be looked after;
- Adoption and Permanence Legislation and Guidance: adoption reforms, including adopter recruitment and adoption reform grant and PLO have helped but the impact of legislation such as B-S judgement and 26 week target are challenging;
- Welfare Reforms and Child Poverty: An increase in prevalence and awareness of neglect, increase in families in acute stress and homelessness are bring more children and families to the attention of children's social care, as well as additional funding pressures through for example families with no recourse to public funds;
- Increasing population, and demographic factors;
- Ofsted Inspection frameworks can put additional pressure on authorities;
- SEND reforms through the Children and Families Act 2014 will generate significant changes for disability services, schools, health and other partners.

52% of authorities believe that the trajectory of demand for safeguarding services will continue to increase.

## 5. Conclusion

The predictions two years ago in Phase 3 have been realised in terms of continued increases in children and young people requiring children's social care interventions and the reasons behind these. Performance indicators for children's social care, although largely process measures rather than understanding outcomes for children and young people, appear to show no improvement in the England average since 2007/8. Demand continues to outstrip supply of service provision.

There has been, and continues to be, a significant amount of change for local children's services. Respondents demonstrated a pro-active, thoughtful and evidence-informed approach to implementing change and re-designing services in the face of significant funding reductions but many of the factors which cause increases in demand for services are outside of their control. The increase in the number of children and families living in poverty alone will challenge the most innovative of authorities.

To answer the research questions in Phase 4:

**a) Safeguarding Activity:** The continued overall increase in safeguarding activity is evident and at a faster rate for child protection plans than children looked after. Apart from a slight decline in 2012/13, referrals to children's social care, children in need, children subjects of a child protection plan, and children looked after have increased in the last two years across responding authorities. However there is also greater disparity between authorities and we are now seeing some who appear to have 'turned the curve' to reduce children's social care activity in one or more areas such as referrals, child protection plans or children looked after.

Early Help services are varied in structure and maturity. Some LAs have a good story to tell, their services are demonstrably reducing some social care interventions, although reductions are not uniform (i.e. a reduction in one type of intervention, for example number of children who are subjects of child protection plans, may be evidenced against an increase in children looked after or vice versa). Early help services in many authorities are in the midst of significant cuts, with 79% reporting that these services are being re-designed into more targeted services or in some cases, early help services are being abolished.

Whilst many of the previously reported issues for children and young people contributing to the need for social care involvement remain, there has been a sharper focus in some areas such as CSE, neglect and domestic abuse, as well as greater prevalence of socio-demographic factors such as population increases and greater cultural and ethnic diversity in the populations of some local areas. Economic factors (welfare reforms, housing, and deprivation) and parental factors (toxic trio) as well as increased awareness and media attention also feature as causes for the increase.

**b) Holding the risk:** Risk management in safeguarding is a complex issue. There are increasing numbers of young people with complex and challenging needs, some of whom are also involved in risk taking behaviours. Balancing the provision of early help services and escalation to social care when statutory intervention is required, is reported to be working well in some authorities who have effective early help, and the right conditions for conversations about risk. Risk management depends on a skilled workforce and sustained investment, as well as the effectiveness of early help strategies, the multi-agency commitment to and resourcing of these, and the subsequent evidence base for their impact.

Social work recruitment and retention problems and high proportions of agency staff are reported to be issues for many authorities.

**c) Revolving Door:** There is little evidence of a diminishing ‘revolving door’ of re-referrals into social care services; children are continuing to be subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time and some local authorities reported more children coming back into care for a second or subsequent time. There is also evidence of a ‘family revolving door’ – families that have had a previous child, or children, removed.

**d) Budget cuts** have and will continue to have an impact on all aspects of safeguarding. Nearly all authorities are experiencing - in some cases severe - funding reductions and spending pressures to the extent where some services such as youth services and Children’s Centres will be significantly reduced. The funding available from programmes such as the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme Fund and Troubled Families, and the existence of the Adoption Reform Grant are valued and valuable. However, the time-limited nature of these funding streams brings into sharp relief the sustainability of the improvement in outcomes for children, young people and families that are beginning to be achieved.

In terms of predictions of factors affecting safeguarding activity made in Phase 3, these are clearly borne out by the evidence and the ‘perfect storm’ predicted in Phase 2, reinforced in Phase 3 is still present with no signs of abating.

-----