

ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES LTD

SAFEGUARDING PRESSURES PROJECT PHASE 2: EXPLORING REASONS AND EFFECT

Executive Summary

September 2010

1. Introduction

Safeguarding related pressures on local authority children's services departments have been the subject of much discussion and media attention since the death of Baby Peter was reported in November 2008. In February 2010, the ADCS Council of Reference agreed the importance of having robust, recent, national data to evidence changes in safeguarding activity and, supported by the National College, commissioned a project to evaluate the impact of increased safeguarding activities and budget pressures associated with those increases.

The Phase 1 report in April 2010 provided analysis from 105 local authorities covering 75% of the England under 18 population and evidenced significant increase in all safeguarding activities except granting of Full Care Orders, against a fairly static population. This next phase of research takes the initial work further, exploring reasons for the increases, cost pressures and the effect of, and on, partner agencies.

Local authorities provided information about the source of initial contacts and referrals; the age and category of need of children subject of a Child Protection Plan and children looked after; national indicators relating to timeliness; financial information; Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) data; and a range of qualitative questions about safeguarding activity. The final report is based on responses from 87 local authorities (57%), covering 60% of the England under 18 population. Not all respondents answered all questions; the percentage figures given in each section relate to the number of local authorities responding to that particular question.

2. Local Authority Analysis

2.1 Source of Initial Contacts and Referrals

The source of initial contacts and referrals are grouped into four broad categories: Education, Police, Health, Parent/Carer/Family Member and All Other (e.g. housing, adult social services

and other local authority departments, voluntary organisations, prison and probation services and members of the public).

Respondents reported a 29.2% increase in initial contacts between 2007/08 to 2009/10, but the breakdown of initial contacts by source shows minimal variation over three years. On average, the largest source group is Police (36.5%), followed by All Other (31.7%), Parent/Carer/Family member (12.3%), Health (10.3%) and Education (9.2%). There has been a slight reduction in contacts from Health and Parent/Carer/Family Member. However, the variation between authorities is significant and indicates that there is no emerging pattern.

The total number of referrals received between 2007/08 and 2009/10 by the 56 responding authorities increased from 213,080 to 250,001 (17.3%), equivalent to an increase in rate of referrals per 10,000 under 18 population from 474 to 557. The breakdown by source of referral shows again a reduction in the proportion of total referrals received from Health (from 14.7% to 13.0% of all referrals) and Parent/Carer/Family Member (from 14.2% to 11.1%). The proportion of all referrals from Police has remained fairly stable (from 23.8% to 23.5%). The biggest increase appears to be from other sources, as shown in the 'All Other' category.

2.2 Reasons: Primary Need Codes and Categories of Abuse

The need codes provided by local authorities for children referred and also on becoming looked after enable us to identify the predominant reason for the child coming to the attention of children's social care departments. These are categorised using the standard DfE categories which are well established within local authorities.

The largest overall reason for referral remains 'abuse and neglect (N1)' which was stated as the primary need category on 38% of referrals reported by responding authorities in 2009/10. The number of referrals where reason is 'not stated (N0)' has halved over the three years, which will by implication lead to an increase in 'stated' categories of need. It is therefore more helpful to *exclude* the 'not stated (N0)' category. 'Abuse and neglect (N1)' again remains proportionately the largest category (an increase over three years from 38.9% to 42.5%). 'Cases other than children need' (N9) accounted for 3.3% of total referrals in 2009/10, a reduction from 9.0% in 2007/8. There was also a reduction in referrals for 'Child's disability or illness' (N2) from 5.7% to 4.6% of all referrals, though absolute numbers of referrals for this reason still increase.

In terms of reasons for becoming looked after, increases were visible across all categories of need other than Absent Parenting (N8). Abuse or neglect (N1) is the largest single category of need, increasing by 53.3% over three years.

Whilst neglect remains the largest overall category of abuse for new Child Protection Plans, accounting for 53.0% of new plans, the largest percentage variance increases are in the categories of Physical Abuse and Emotional Abuse.

2.3 Age of Children Becoming Looked After or Subject of Child Protection Plans (CPPs)

The 81 responding local authorities reported that although increases can be seen across all age groups in children becoming looked after, the most marked increase over three years is the increase of 131% in the proportion of children becoming looked after aged 16 and over (now accounting for 15% of total number of children becoming looked after, although absolute numbers remain relatively low).

The largest percentage increase in children subject of Child Protection Plans is in the 16 and over age group of children subject of child protection plans, with an increase in 'under 1' and a consequent reduction in the proportion of children becoming subject of Child Protection Plans aged 1 to 15.

3. LSCB and Partner Agencies Information

Nearly all local authorities confirmed that partners also report increases in safeguarding work, especially Police, Health and Schools. However, the analysis shows that whilst contacts and referrals from Police have increased, this is proportionate to the overall rise in numbers and there is no evidence that one single agency is responsible for the increase.

70% of respondents confirmed that their LSCB routinely receives and monitors specific performance data. 25% of responding authorities have their LSCB datasets currently in development or under review. A small number reported that their LSCB does not routinely receive performance data. The range of information monitored by LSCBs is varied, but generally includes children's social care data, CAFs, safe recruitment, training, and domestic abuse data.

It was not possible as part of this study to identify quantifiable evidence of an increase in safeguarding activity across all agencies, but responses from a limited number of authorities about partnership data showed that:

- There was a 49% increase in the number of children known to be living in households where domestic violence has been reported;

- There was no significant change to the national indicator NI 70, (Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and/or deliberate injuries to children and young people) reducing insignificantly from 126 in 2007/8 to 124 in 2009/10;
- A total of 35,766 CAFs were undertaken across responding authorities in 2009/10. This is a massive increase in total number of CAFs per 10,000 under 18 population over the past three years from 33 in 2007/8, to 66 in 2008/9, and 88 in 2009/10.

4. Understanding Why

97% of safeguarding leads in responding local authorities felt that one of the reasons for the increase in safeguarding activities was due to media reporting of high profile cases such as Baby Peter which generated heightened anxiety and increased both public and professional awareness. However, local authorities commented that increases in the volume of statutory work did not appear to be linked to the 'Baby Peter effect' alone and that the reasons for the increase are complex and varied:

- professionals in other agencies had become more cautious in light of heightened awareness and had lowered their own thresholds for referral to children's social care;
- 17% attributed the increase in referrals to the implementation of the CAF;
- 21% felt that there has been an increase in the promotion of safeguarding awareness, training and more coherent multi-agency processes implemented over the past three years,
- 19% felt that the consequences of changes to legislation were a factor, including the Southwark Judgement (how local authorities support homeless 16 and 17 year olds); and Public Law Outline (changes to care and other children's proceedings from April 2008);
- 17% felt that the economic downturn accounts for increase in safeguarding activity;
- 12 authorities (19%) cite increases in domestic abuse referrals as a reason for increases in children's social care intervention with families;
- three authorities felt that an increase of orchestrated campaigns by some leading charities had an effect on volumes;
- the shortage of skilled, experienced social workers and the calibre of newly qualified social workers was an issue that three local authorities said they are facing;
- three authorities felt there was an increase in the more formal response to allegations against staff (LADO);
- three experienced an increase in referral of unborn babies and post-birth interventions;
- some authorities also stated they are seeing an increase in parental mental health issues, substance misuse, self-harm and in one authority, the effect of increased gang culture.

43 out of 63 authorities (68%) had not changed their thresholds over the past three years and of the eight authorities who had changed their thresholds, there were a number of reasons for doing so. Four authorities felt that the referring agencies had lowered their thresholds for referral to children's social care services, especially in the case of Police domestic abuse referrals, so that more cases were being referred on.

Performance Indicators: Assessments and Work to Timescales

This study also aimed to explore some of the potential consequences of safeguarding increases including the effect on timeliness of work by analysing four performance indicators. Although some of the 2009/10 results are provisional (final DfE statistics are published at the end of September 2010), they illustrate deterioration in the number of initial assessments and core assessments carried out to prescribed timescale:

- NI59: Timeliness of initial assessments = 70.3% (-2.5 percentage points)
- NI60: Timeliness of core assessments = 74.0% (-5 percentage points)
- NI67: Timeliness of child protection reviews = 98.0% (-1.2 percentage points)
- NI66: Timeliness of LAC reviews = 92.9% (-1.2 percentage points).

Despite the small size of the reduction in NI67, this is nonetheless significant as it has been common in recent years for many authorities to achieve 100% of child protection reviews on time. However, the deterioration in performance this year could also partly be a result of different collection methods (i.e. via the CIN Census for NIs 59, 60 and 67).

5. Possible Effects of Population Changes

Population data in the first phase of this research was based on the latest available Office for National Statistics (ONS) data: mid-year estimates for 2008. 2009 mid-year population estimates¹ published by ONS in June 2010 report an increase of 0.04% between 2008 and 2009, equivalent to 4,200 children across England, and greater than their forecast of 0.01% rise for 2009. The greatest regional change is in London showing an increase of 1.53%.

Future population projections² from the ONS³ show that the size of the under 18 population is predicted to grow from 11.004 million in 2008 to 11.612 million in 2019 (+5.5%) and 12.275 million in 2033 (+11.6%). Regional variation in the level of change is forecast, with London

¹ ONS Publication: Population Estimates June 2010 <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/pop0610.pdf>

² The supplied Population Projections are trend rather than policy based and as such they provide an indication of future populations assuming past trends are realised.

³ ONS May 2010: Sub-National Population Projections (SNPP) for England

expected to see a 19.1% growth in the under 18 population by 2033, and the North West and North East experiencing decreases initially before population rises.

This projected population rise is likely to have consequences for safeguarding activities. Based on population growth alone (i.e. no other reason), we can forecast an additional 3,000 (5.5%) looked after children in England by 2019 and an additional 1,900 children subject of Child Protection Plans by 2019 based on the latest England rate of 31 per 10,000 population.

6. Counting the Cost

Quantifying the Burden on Partners due to Increases in Child Protection Work

In Phase 1, we evidenced a 33% rise in children subject of Child Protection Plans across respondent authorities – equivalent to an all England increase of approximately 9,200 children. The impact on those professionals involved in child protection functions, in attending statutory child protection meetings alone equates to an additional 12.3 hours per case, without accounting for the necessary travel time, writing reports or completing casework recording or safeguarding work with the child and family. The result would be an additional 63,000 hours per year per agency attendee spent in child protection meetings – and correspondingly more if there is more than one representative per agency.

Local Authority Budget Information

Of the 26 local authorities providing full three year data, the financial pressure is evidenced by a predicted 8% overspend across these authorities in 2009/10 despite a 12% increase in budget. 43 local authorities provided both budget and forecast financial data for last year only (2009/10) and in total they forecast expenditure 5.9% above budget. Only nine local authorities (21%) were predicting either underspends or balancing their total children looked after budget.

The financial data provided by respondents as part of this study is valuable, but all England financial information reported by DfE is also available⁴. Children's services expenditure is not reported per under 18 population, but as a per *pupil* figure. This shows a reduction across all five budget lines – including a reduction of 29% in the average budget per pupil of total children looked after; 19% reduction in total family support services and 19% reduction in total children and young people's safety.

⁴ DCSF (2008) and DCSF (2009): Section 52 benchmarking 2007/8 and 2008/9

Combining Activity and Cost Data

The data gathered at Phase 1 was matched to the study from Loughborough University (Holmes *et al* 2010) which calculated unit costs for safeguarding work. Although recognised as not perfectly accurate, the cost calculations go some way to illustrating the costs of safeguarding activity - an estimated £243.3 million across England in 2008/9 purely to undertake initial contacts, referrals and initial assessments.

The financial consequences of an increase in numbers of children looked after is more difficult to estimate on a national basis. The average cost of an Independent Foster Provider placement has recently been calculated at approximately £45,000 per year⁵ although the actual cost will vary depending on the needs of a child. Using this figure and the reported increase of 8.1% in the number of children looked after in the two year period between December 2007 and December 2009⁶, we can estimate that the *additional* 3,850 children looked after at 31 December 2009 across England will cost an additional £173 million per year.

There are a number of complex factors around predicting future costs. An increase in the numbers of children being looked after may create a strain on in-house fostering places and so additional children are most likely to be placed in independent foster care, which is generally more expensive than in-house foster carer placements.

7. Considerations & Challenges

Changes to statutory indicators and returns often mean that obtaining the trend data essential for measuring, forecasting demand for and improving services is more difficult. Attempts to forecast future levels of safeguarding activity could be misleading, given inconsistent variables such as media attention and effects of future policy and fiscal changes.

There will be a commentary by the ADCS accompanying the publication of this research on the implications and challenges for a range of policy-makers arising from the evidence base provided by both phases of this project.

In addition to this ADCS project, several similar evaluations have been conducted and the ADCS has taken the opportunity to triangulate key messages from these studies to provide a more consolidated evidence base. Meta-analysis across six regional or national studies shows

⁵ As calculated by a South Eastern authority and benchmarking club for a recent LGA submission.

⁶ As per Phase 1 research. Estimated total at 31 Dec 2009 = 63,456:8.1% increase on 2 years previous.

that there was widespread corroboration of almost all of the findings from Phase 1 of this ADCS project.

8. Conclusion

The information gathered here is based on a smaller sample than the initial phase but it reinforces the increase in safeguarding activity and shows that there is a range of reasons for the increase, some of which are positive steps forward in terms of better awareness of safeguarding children and young people. The data provides evidence of:

- An increase in initial contacts and referrals from all sources but less so from Health and family members;
- A significant rise in 16-17 year olds subject of Child Protection Plans or looked after;
- A higher proportion of referrals and children becoming looked after for reasons of abuse and neglect;
- Variation between authorities in terms of the size of changes in safeguarding activities and the source and reasons.

The 2009/10 budget for responding authorities is insufficient to meet increasing needs, with a 5.9% overspend forecast across 43 authorities. Crude calculations to quantify the increase in resource and cost implications shows that there would need to be an additional 63,000 hours per year per agency attendee spent in child protection meetings alone and an additional £173m per year to resource placements for the *additional* numbers of children looked after. The cost across England to undertake all initial contacts, referrals and initial assessments in 2008/9 would have been approximately £243 million.

There are clear indications that the under 18 population in England is set to increase. Despite regional variations in size of population growth, there is an overall growth of 5.5% by 2019. The effect of forecast population growth alone equates to an additional 3,000 looked after children by 2019 and an additional 1,900 children subject of child protection plans. Many of the reasons for the increase in the volume of safeguarding activity over the past three years will continue: the effects of the Southwark Judgement; increased public and professional awareness and improved multi-agency training; more complex cases where parental factors are affecting the children such as domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health.

As Lord Laming reminds us, *“getting safeguarding practice right needs a clear and distinct focus but it also needs to be a central part of Children’s services overall, complemented and*

reinforced by early intervention and preventative work with children, young people, their families and carers. People with the right skills, doing the right thing at the right time, make a crucial difference to children's outcomes and their futures".

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