



Research Report

SAFEGUARDING PRESSURES PHASE 7

February 2021

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd



The research was commissioned by the Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd and undertaken by Carole Brooks Associates Limited on their behalf. The Association retains ownership of the data and of the publication rights to the report.

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, once again, to all local authorities,
regional performance leads and individuals who participated
in this research.**

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Foreword

Every child deserves to be happy, healthy and safe from harm. Much like we would wish for our own children, we want every child to have the best opportunities to thrive in life. For a growing number of children and young people they will need help from the services we provide, with our partner agencies, for this to become a reality.

It may be hard to recall a world before Covid-19 where life seemed simpler and children and young people did not have to consider when they would next be able to attend school or college and meet with friends. Yet even before the outbreak of the pandemic, demand for children's services had been increasing dramatically for over 10 years. The needs of the children and families who we support are becoming more complex while local authority budgets have been cut in half since 2010, thus limiting our ability to provide vital preventative early help services. The pandemic, ensuing lockdown and social distancing measures have had a significant impact on children's mental and emotional health and wellbeing, exposed and heightened the challenges that many children and families are facing, from ill-health, poor quality housing, poverty and inequality. The prevalence of domestic abuse, poor parental mental health and substance misuse are more common amongst children and families we work with than ever before.

Phase 7 of Safeguarding Pressures research captures some of the impact of this on children's services, but also evidences the changes in demand for, and provision of, children's early help, social care and associated services since 2007. We are now able to compare data over a 12 year period to give us a comprehensive and robust evidence base. This year we received another extraordinary response rate covering 89% of England's children and young people population. I would like to thank everybody involved in this research who have readily offered their time during such a difficult and busy period. They continue to make this work possible.

It is clear from the evidence presented here, that unless national government addresses the wider societal determinants of family distress we cannot make sustained improvements in the lives of children. The coming months and years will reveal the true impact of the pandemic on the lives of children and young people. Now, more than ever, we must work collectively to make this a country that works for all children.

Jenny Coles

President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services



1 Introduction

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) is committed to ensuring an evidence-based approach to planning and delivery of children's services. As part of this commitment, ADCS has commissioned phase 7 of its Safeguarding Pressures research to examine changes in demand, needs and the delivery of children's early help, social care and associated services, set in the wider national policy context.

Since the first report (ADCS, 2010a), each phase has focused on providing evidence of what was important to directors of children's services and emerging issues at that time. Phase 7 brings the evidence base up to date. In addition to the core features of Safeguarding Pressures research in providing a longitudinal view of the past twelve years (2008 to 2020) and look ahead to 2025, there is a specific focus on the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

An interim report was published in December 2020, providing early headlines from the evidence available at that time.

2 Summary of Previous Phases

Through each of the previous six phases of Safeguarding Pressures research, a continued, though not universal, rise in safeguarding activity was evidenced and factors contributing to this appeared to be becoming more acute and more prevalent. Forecasts of increases in the number of children and young people requiring children's social care services against reducing budgets and population increase in each phase have been realised for many local authority children's services.

Phases 1 (ADCS, 2010a) and 2 (ADCS, 2010b) reported increases due to factors such as the impact of the Southwark Judgement¹; heightened anxiety and increased public and professional awareness (partly due to the death of Peter Connelly); and more coherent multi-agency processes improving identification of needs.

In Phase 3 (ADCS, 2012), respondents were hopeful that once effective early help services were implemented, they would start to see a reduction in referrals, children subjects of child protection plans and children looked after, but only after an initial rise in activity as cases of

¹ The Southwark Judgement, made by The House of Lords (G vs Southwark) in May 2009 is a piece of case law that obliges children's services to provide accommodation and support to homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

previously unmet need were identified. A focus on permanency for children looked after evidenced that there was an equal, and growing number of children leaving care through special guardianship orders and residence orders compared to those leaving care through adoption, the latter being a significant focus of national government policy at this time.

Phase 4 (ADCS, 2014) found that whilst many of the previously reported issues for children and young people contributing to the need for social care involvement remained, there had been a sharper focus on some areas such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), neglect and domestic abuse, as well as greater prevalence of socio-demographic factors. However, there was also greater disparity between authorities. 79% of respondents were in the midst of reducing or re-designing early help into more targeted services. Some appeared to have ‘turned the curve’ to reduce children’s social care activity in one or more areas although understanding the prevalence and impact of early help services nationally was difficult.

Phase 5 (ADCS, 2016a) evidenced that the trend of rising activity since 2007/8 showed some signs of diminishing and greater variation for particular authorities, although overall the trend remained on an upward trajectory. There was evidence of the impact of investment in early help services where these were established, but the impact of funding cuts also very evident. There were myriad factors outside of the direct influence of the local authority which impacted upon the provision of effective services to children and their families, but local leaders had managed thus far to contain some of them – but forecasted that *“looking forward, the increase in the number of children and families living in poverty alone would challenge the most innovative of authorities”*.

Phase 6 (ADCS, 2018) provided a compelling picture of the escalating needs of children and their families due, for example, to wider societal determinants of family distress; new and greater risks to children and young people outside the family home, in addition to the continued growth in the child population. The ripple effect of pressures in one part of the system, e.g. the pressures experienced by universal services, such as education, housing or health services, was evidenced to in turn impact on the lives of children to such an extent that they required more intensive levels of support. There was a sense that authorities had been constantly re-designing and re-configuring services to meet needs and manage the growth in demand. In many cases this was achieved successfully, but short-term funding sources and continued presentation of unmet and escalating need outside of the control of children’s services risked unsustainability.

3 Phase 7 Research Questions and Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The core objective for phase 7 research remains to understand safeguarding and early help activity and support for vulnerable young people, with an additional lens on the response to, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research questions fall broadly into the following four areas:

1. Evidencing early help and safeguarding activity, and changes in both demand and strategy to address these.
2. The influencing factors outside of the direct control of the local authority and the impact of these.
3. Specifically, how have children's services responded to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent measures to control it. What has been, and what is projected to be the impact of these?
4. How children's services are managing demand and change, including resources to do so.

For the purposes of this research, 'children's social care' incorporates any services provided under Section 17 or 20 of The Children Act 1989, including: children in need, children looked after, care leavers, fostering, adoption and permanency, child protection, social care strategy, commissioning and social work, and statutory services for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

'Early help' generally incorporates services provided outside of the statutory framework of The Children Act 1989 by the local authority or other agencies and voluntary organisations including targeted and specialist services and interventions to meet a variety of needs - parenting programmes, family support, school-based programmes, mentoring schemes, children's centres, family hubs and youth services.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Sources

The same four data collection methods and analysis methodology as previous phases have been used, with the addition of the common core dataset produced by the nine Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIAs). These metrics provide a more up to date analysis of core safeguarding activity to September 2020.

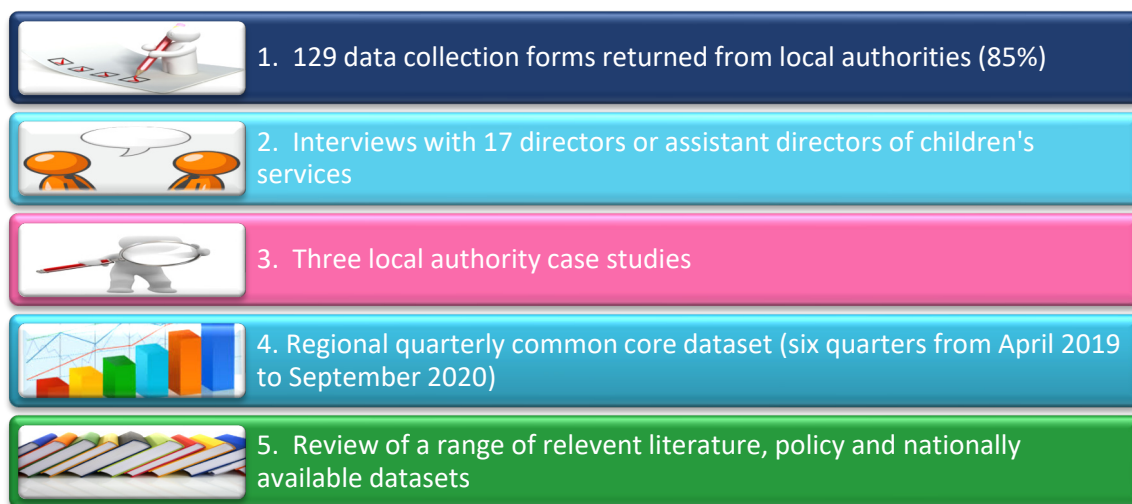


Figure 1: Summary of methodology

These sources provide robust triangulation of the evidence since safeguarding pressures research began. During that time, we have seen the creation of new authorities and Children’s Services Trusts. At the time of publication, there are 151 local authorities and four trusts (Birmingham, Doncaster, Sandwell and Slough). The term ‘local authorities’ has been used throughout as a generic term to refer to local authorities, children’s services trusts and other alternative delivery vehicles.

3.2.2 Data collection form

All local authorities received a data collection form seeking national and local data and posing qualitative questions in the same format as previous years.² 129 local authorities (85%) returned the data collection form, providing information covering 10.7 million (89%) children and young people aged 0-17³ (figure 2). Responses were received from all types of authorities and all regions (figure 3).

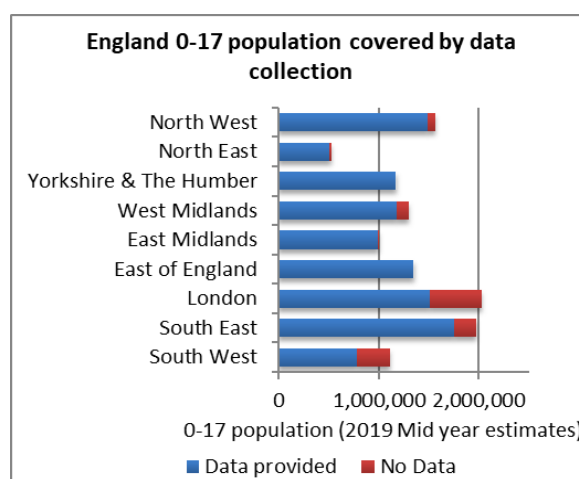


Figure 2: 0-17 population covered by responding authorities

² A copy of the data collection form is available on the ADCS website: <https://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/safeguarding-pressures>

³ Based on ONS 2019 mid-year population estimates (ONS, 2020).

Region	Number of Responses			0-17 Population that responses cover (2019 MYE)			
	Respon- dents	Total LAs	% total LAs	Data provided	No Data	All LAs	% total 0-17pop.
North West	21	23	91%	1,483,303	80,157	1,563,460	95%
North East	11	12	92%	509,528	22,529	532,057	96%
Yorkshire & The Humber	15	15	100%	1,169,941	0	1,169,941	100%
West Midlands	13	14	93%	1,182,083	117,720	1,299,803	91%
East Midlands	8	9	89%	994,795	7,854	1,002,649	99%
East of England	11	11	100%	1,346,457	0	1,346,457	100%
London	25	33	76%	1,510,274	522,153	2,032,427	74%
South East	16	19	84%	1,756,693	212,604	1,969,297	89%
South West	9	15	60%	777,053	330,424	1,107,477	70%
England	129	151	85%	10,730,127	1,293,441	12,023,568	89%

Figure 3: Responses by region

3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

17 interviews were conducted with directors and/or assistant directors of children’s services, representing every region and type of authority (figure 4). Eight questions were asked relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, historical and predicted changes, early help, funding, challenges and enablers, as well as an option for the interviewee to add any other information.

Region		Type of Authority	
North East	2	London Borough	2
North West	1	Metropolitan	7
Yorkshire & The Humber	2	Shire	3
West Midlands	3	Unitary	5
East Midlands	2		
East of England	1	Latest Ofsted Judgements	
London	2	Outstanding	2
South East	3	Good	7
South West	1	Requires Improvement	5
		Inadequate	3

Figure 4: Interviewees by region, type, Ofsted judgement

3.2.4 Case studies

Three local authorities volunteered to be case studies to test out hypotheses from the data collection and provide examples of both the strategic approach to children’s services, and of the challenges and enablers for individual authorities. The case study authorities have consented to be identified and case studies are presented as short summaries in Section 18.

3.2.5 Quarterly regional data to September 2020

A common core dataset of 18 metrics, collected and used for benchmarking on a quarterly basis, is owned by the local authorities who make up each of the nine Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances. We have worked with the performance lead for each region to collect data for the six quarters from April 2019 to September 2020 to compare differences between the first six months of this year and the same six months last year.

3.2.6 Literature search and nationally available data

A range of relevant research, reviews, reports, and existing data provided a fifth source of information. Some of the major reviews are included in the timeline.

3.3 Definitions, data quality and limitations of the research

Common definitions of terms used within this report are provided in a separate glossary (Appendix A).

Notes to accompany data and calculations are provided below:

- Response rates are given as a percentage of those who provided information for that question with valid data only, resulting in different numbers of respondents quoted
- Findings from all sources have been triangulated so that where appropriate, a synopsis of a range of evidence provides key findings in each section
- Regional or other trends, commonalities or outliers have been investigated and identified where relevant
- Direct quotations and examples from respondents have been provided where appropriate as a lens directly into local authority experiences and views
- Historically, Safeguarding Pressures research reports have been published before Department for Education (DfE) statistical releases, thus providing more timely data relating to social care, and crucially, a narrative to accompany it. DfE data are now available at the time of this publication and in some instances, for example the summary activity tables, DfE published data for all England have been used. Safeguarding Pressures research data generally align with DfE published statistics, but it should be recognised that this research is a sample of authorities only, and as such rates per 10,000 and any extrapolated numbers may not match exactly to DfE statistical publications which are based on responses from all authorities at child level
- Percentage change in the numbers and the rates per 10,000 of the 0-17 population will vary and both have been included in summary tables. The percentage change in rates shows the difference once any change in population has already been accounted for, whilst percentage change in numbers shows the true change in demand. This continues to be a critical difference to understand as increases in population continue to drive up demand in children's services.

4 Context, Legislation and Policy

There are 12.0 million children and young people aged 0-17 in England (ONS, 2020), an increase of 1.3% from two years ago. Spending by local authorities on education, children's and young people's services was £40.3 billion in the financial year 2019/20, an increase of 1% from two years ago, with school expenditure accounting for over two-thirds and continuing the trend seen in recent years. Within this, the total expenditure on children and young people's services increased by 7% from 2018/19 to £10.53 billion in 2019/20 (DfE, 2020). Further details about population and funding are provided in sections 14 and 16 respectively.

The timeline below illustrates the key context, events, reviews, and legislation which have, and continue to impact upon children's services over the past 12 years and into the next period. A more comprehensive and scrollable timeline can be found on the ADCS website⁴. A separate timeline illustrating the significant changes in context experienced in the past twelve months during the Covid-19 pandemic is included in section 5: Safeguarding during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specific legislation and policy are referenced throughout the report to illustrate links between national policy and research findings, for example in relation to care leavers. 77 authorities provided information about the impact of national legislation, policy or initiatives on safeguarding in the last two years. Respondents highlighted the following as influencing children's services, in order of reported impact:

- Interpretation, application, keeping up to date and reframing practice based on the range of coronavirus regulations and restrictions (Section 5)
- Respondents raised the challenges and pressures resulting from Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) policy, legislation and funding, whereby the crisis within this sector now equals that of children's social care
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended the cohort of young people to whom support must be offered, to those aged 21-25, which meant resources were redirected to provide the additional services required. The new burdens funding following the extension of care leavers duties to 25 years of age is now woefully out of kilter with the expectations of the support offered to that cohort of adults (Section 13)
- Delay in launching The Children's Social Care Review, which aims to address major challenges in children's social care, such as the increase in numbers of children looked

⁴ <https://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/timeline>

after, variation in children's social care practice, outcomes across the country, and the ability of the system to provide enough stable homes for children

- There are mixed views on the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of regionalisation of adoption agencies. These have been positive for many authorities in terms of finding families for children. Other authorities reported that it has been time consuming for those who were already doing well in achieving permanence for children (Section 11)
- Increase in attention to contextual safeguarding activity, likely a consequence of national policy initiatives and drive for contextual safeguarding approaches to be developed by DfE, Ofsted and the Home Office, greater research around criminal exploitation, in addition to increases in prevalence (Section 14)
- Refugee and asylum seeker legislation, policy and funding, including voluntary status of the National Transfer Scheme (Section 12)
- Authorities stated that improved multi-agency safeguarding and partnership working have resulted from changes to local area safeguarding partnership arrangements
- The implications for children's services of the expected changes to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and the Mental Capacity Act, implementation of which have been delayed
- Delay in the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill hampered the strategic developments acutely required to respond to escalating prevalence and needs (Section 14)
- The NHS policy drive to reduce the number of children in tier 4 mental health placements which has resulted in those children very often being referred for secure welfare placements, which remain in acute shortage (Section 11)
- There are anxieties in some parts of the sector about the unintended consequence of increased placement pressures if the government imposes national strictures on the use of unregulated placements (Section 11)
- Impact of Public Law Outline and Public Law Working Group (Family Justice Group) recommendations to achieve best practice in the child protection and family justice systems (Section 10).

	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
EVENTS	Oct 2014: SoS announces Social Work reform	Mar 2015: Anne Longfield Children's Commissioner	2016-18 Justine Greening SoS for Education		Jun 2016: BREXIT Referendum	2017-2018 Robert Goodhill Childrens Minister	Jun 2017: General Election in the UK	2018 Nadhim Zahawi Childrens Minister
			7 May 2015: General Election in UK		Jul 2016: Change of Prime Minister & Cabinet	Feb 2017: CSA Centre of Expertise launches	Dec 2017: Board of the Social Mobility Commission resigns	Jan 2018- Damien Hinds SoS for Education
					June 2016: Ellie Butler SCR published	Jul 2016: Govt consults on mandatory reporting	Feb 2017: New Definition of CSE published	May 2018: Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner resigns
	Feb 2014: Adoption Leadership Board commences		Sept 2015: Syrian VPR Scheme announced	Mar 2016: Andrew Christie becomes ALB Chair	May 2016: National interim SCH co-ordination unit launched	Jul 2016: National UASC dispersal scheme (NTS) starts	2017: Residential care leadership board operating	Jan 2018: Govt dept DCLG becomes MHCLG
					Apr 2016: HE & FE transferred from BIS to DfE	Nov 2016: Calais Camps closed	2017: Staying close trialled via innovation programme	Mar 2018: Family Justice observatory development phase initiated
LEGISLATION, GUIDANCE AND POLICY	2013-2017: Welfare Reform Act Implemented				2013-2017: Welfare Reform Act Implemented		Jul 2017: Tax free childcare	Jan 2018: Universal Credit advance
	Children and Families Act 2014	Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015	Apr 2015: Care Act 2014 implemented	Jan 2016: Govt publish Children's Social Care Reform	Education and Adoption Act 2016	Jul 2016: Govt Putting children first: our vision for children's social care	2017: Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Children and Social Work Act 2017
	2014: Statutory guidance children who go missing	Modern Slavery Act 2015	Serious Crime Act 2015	Mar 2016: Education White Paper	May 2016: Children and Social Work Bill	Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill 2016	Sept 2017: Youth Custody Service Launched	2017 Regional Improvement Alliances pilot
	2014: Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children	Mar 2015: Working together 2015 published	Deprivation of Liberty Amendment & code of practice	Oct 2015: Mandatory Reporting of FGM	Childcare Act 2016	Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016	Gov publishes social mobility action pilot (2017)	New Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance 2018
	2014: Public Law Outline	2014: Staying Put duties on LAs	Children's Homes Regulations 2015		May 2016: Govt accepts the 'Dubs' Amendment	Immigration Act 2016		Nov 2017: Guidance re Unaccompanied and trafficked CYP
	2014: Govt Care Leavers Strategy	2015: Re: N court judgment re S20	2015: Promoting the educational achievement of CLA	2016: Special Guardianship Guidance	Mar 2016: Adoption: A Vision for change strategy	Sep 2016: Judgement re use of Scottish secure estate	Apr 2017: Regional Adoption Agencies Commence	Apr 2018: Care leavers now eligible for support up to age 25
	Jun 2014: SEND Code of Practice implemented	Sept 2014: Phased replacement of SEN with EHC plans	CA 1989 Vol 2 - Care Planning, Placement And Case Review (2015)	2016: Govt Care Leavers Strategy inc new duties				Sexual violence & harassment in Schools Guidance 2017
		2015 KSS Published	Sep 2015: The College of Social Work closes	Dec 2015: PM names eight LAs as 'Partners in Practice'				Guidance for LAs on the local offer for care leavers (2019)
INSPECTION & REVIEW	Jul 2014: historical sex abuse review announced			Mar 2016: Wood Review of LSCBs	Jul 2016: Sir Martin Narey Review into Residential Care	Aug 2016: Govt launch national stocktake of fostering	Feb 2017: HM Govt Tackling CSE progress report	2017: Lammy Review into Disproportionality Publishes
		Mar 2015: Govt 'future in mind' report from Mental Health TF		2016: Charlie Taylor Youth Justice Review	Feb 2016: Independent Mental Health TF publish Five Year Forward View	Jan 2017: Lenehen review "These are our children"	2017: SCIE review of children in care mental health	Jan 2018: implementing five year forward view
	Aug 2014: Jay Report - CSE in Rotherham	Feb 2015: Oxfordshire SCR on 'Bullfinch CSE' cases		2016 Govt Tackling CSE Action Plan	May 2016: Govt accepts the 'Dubs' Amendment coming Bill	Sept 2016: CSE Rapid Response Unit launched	Oct 2017: CQC publishes review of CAMHS	Feb 2018: Fostering Stocktake completed
	Aug 2014: Ofsted Multi-agency inspection consultation	Oct 2014: Ofsted CSE themed inspections	Mar 2015: Integrated inspections due to commence	Feb 2016: Ofsted launch JTAI inspections (CSE)	April 2016: Ofsted SEND Area inspection launched	Sept 2016: Ofsted DA Themed JTAI	Sept 2018: Ofsted Child Sexual Abuse in Family JTAI	May 2018: Neglect JTAI launches
FUNDING		2015: Comprehensive Spending review (for 2017-2020)	2015-2020: Troubled Families Programme Phase 2	Feb 2016: SoS committed to a 'Fair Funding Review'	2016: Partners in Practice (8) announced	2017: London Policing and Crime funding reductions	Jun 2017: LGA state 2.3bn funding gap by 2020	Dec 2017: Provisional Local Govt Finance Settlement 2018-19
	Apr 2014: Further EIG funding changes to formula grant	2014: A better start Big Lottery Funding for 4 areas	Apr 2015: Public Health funding for 0-5s and HVs transfer to LA	Feb 2016: Funding for mental health (Future in Mind)	2016 - 2020: DfE Innovation Programme	Nov 2017: DfE Innovation Prog final evaluation report	Sep 2017: Free childcare for eligible 3 and 4 year olds	Dec 2017: DfE consult on new fair funding review
						Dec 2016: High Needs Funding Reform Consultation	Sept 2017: Removal of ESG. 'Soft' schools funding formula	Mar 2018: £17m funding for a further 8 Partners in Practice
Key:	Context	Over-arching	Health	Education	Disability and SEND	Early Help	Child Protection	

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23+			
May 2018: Greater powers for social mobility commission	2018: Child safeguarding practice panel in place	2019: Family Justice Observatory launches	Jan 2020: UK leaves the EU	COVID (see separate timeline)	By 2021, 420,000 new school places will be needed	5.2m children projected to live in poverty	EVENTS
Jun 2018: reduction to 1.3m unemployed (4%)	July 2019: Change of Prime Minister and Cabinet	Sept 2019: Government Prorogues Parliament	Feb 2020: Vicky Ford C&F Minister	Jan 2021: 'Brexit' Transition Period Ends		By 2023: 1.3m more children in England than 15 yrs ago	
2018: National stability forum announced	July 2019: Gavin Williamson SOS for Education	Oct 2019: Queen's Speech	Feb 2020: Scottish Care Review Reports	Spring 2021: New Children's Commissioner for England to be Appointed		By 2024, a growing skills gap will result in 4m too few high skilled people to fulfil employment demand(1)	
2018: Remit of ALB extended to include SGO's	July 2019: Kemi Badenoch C&F Minister	Dec 2019: General election	2020: Residential Care Leadership Board disbands			By 2025: There will be 12.23m children living in England	
June 2018: 18 Violence Reduction Units launched							
Apr 2018: Support for mortgage interest payments cut	Sep 2018: DfE issue 'county lines' guidance	2019: Serious Violence Bill	Mar 2020: Affordable Home Programme	Nov 2020: Social Housing White Paper			LEGISLATION, GUIDANCE AND POLICY
Draft DA Bill consultation 2018	Jul 2018: Transforming CYP Mental Health Provision Green Paper	2019: Domestic Abuse Bill returns	2020: Compulsory RSH Education delayed	2020: Govt plan investment in National Citizen Service			
Apr 2018: All Regional Improvement Alliances live in shadow form	Aug 2018: Govt publishes Civil Society strategy	Apr 2019: New arrangements to replace LSCBs		Sept 2020: KCSIE updated			
Jul 2018: Working Together 2018 published	Govt publishes serious violence strategy	Sept 2019: KCSIE updated		Sept 2020: MoJ Sentencing White Paper			
Jul 2018: CN vs Poole caselaw re duty of care linked to housing	May 2019: Mental Capacity (Amendment) Act 2019	Family Justice Council: Interim guidance on special guardianship					
May 2018: Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper	Role of Virtual School expanded to adopted CYP						
Mar 2018: deadline for transfer to EHCP	Amendments to a range of legislation including Immigration Act 2016						
2018: NAAS Phase 1	2018: What Works Centre in CSC launches		Dec 2019: Social Work England commences				
Apr 2018: Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse Interim Report	Sept 2018: Care Crisis Review publishes	Mar 2018: DfE publishes CIN Review final report	2019: DfE consults on a national EHE register	Feb 2020: National Panel publishes first review on CCE	July 2020: National Panel publishes SUDI learning review		
Children's Homes Regulations 2018	2018: President of the FD Commences a Review of Family Courts	2019: SEND Review launched by the DfE	Oct 2019: CAMHS JTAI launched by Ofsted	June 2020: Charlie Taylor MIPR Review reports			
Jun 2018: Care Crisis Review final report	2018: ICBI publishes report on best interests of UASC	Jan 2019: NHS Long Term Plan publishes	Dec 2019: Government commits to a Care Review	June 2020: National Harm Panel Reports (Private Law)			
Jan 2018: Ofsted ILACS Launched	Sept 2018: Ofsted cease SIF inspections	May 2019: Timpson Review of Exclusions publishes	2020: DfE consults on use of unregulated placements	2020: Alan Wood Review of MASA Reforms			
LGA state £3 Billion funding Gap by 2025	2018: OCC Report on Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020	Mar 2019: £200m Youth Endowment Fund launches	Mar 2020: Troubled Families Funding extended 1 yr	Oct 2020: 1 yr Funding Settlement (CSR cancelled)	Nov 2020: Troubled Families Funding extended 1 yr	'Hard' national schools funding formula	
Apr 2018: Home Office launch £22m EI youth fund for PCCs	Jul 2018: DfE launch £6.5m Social Mobility funding	Apr 2019: £84m Strengthening Families funding launched		£400m commitment to increase police officers by 2023	Commitment to increase £4.3bn for schools by 2023/4		
2018: LGA (Newton Europe) report on costs published	Jul 2018: MHCLG launch £19m DV funding	Sept 2019: £500m Youth Investment Fund announced		Commitment to increase NHS funding by 3.1% by 2023/4			
Children looked after, permanency and care leavers	Refugee and UASC	Complex Safeguarding & Offending	Social work practice				FUNDING

Figure 5: Timeline excerpt. See <https://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/timeline>

5 Safeguarding During the Covid-19 Pandemic

5.1 Context

Analysing responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact on safeguarding and children's services is challenging. Government actions, and local responses to control the pandemic, in addition to non-Covid-19 related factors create a tangle of policy, practice and consequences. The 'Covid-19 timeline' below highlights key events and how the law and government guidance has changed.

Research and information gathered during the year provide snapshots which are often overtaken by new events. For example, findings from early research in July 2020 into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in 15 children's services (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2020) are mirrored here. However, Baginsky and Manthorpe's research reported there was resilience of children's social care staff to the challenges of Covid-19, a situation which, six months later, we heard from respondents is incrementally wearing away.

We know from respondents and other sources what the impact has been so far, how local authority children's services have responded and driven changes to ensure children and families are safe and well.

103 local authorities and 17 interviewees provided information about their approaches to safeguarding and the provision of children's services during the Covid-19 pandemic to October 2020. Every respondent reported a significant impact. Responses demonstrated the tirelessness and tenacity of the sector in their strategic approach; assessment and re-assessment of risk and needs; and providing services to meet those needs in the most effective way possible given the constraints of social distancing and household mixing limitations. We provide more detailed findings in each relevant section throughout this report and the three case studies provide examples of approaches during this time. Section 19 expands on the possible long-term consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and forecasts what may happen in the future.

MORE DETAILED LOOK AT COVID-19 RELATED EVENTS AND CHANGES IN 2020/21

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
COVID-19	5 - First person in the UK dies from Covid-19	2 - Number of cases worldwide passes 1m					30 - UK cases increase to 446,156 and 42,072 people are confirmed to have died	6 - Liverpool begins community mass testing pilot	11 - Number of UK deaths passes 50,000	11 - Targeted testing starts in some secondaries in parts of London, Essex and Kent	Number of UK deaths passes 100,000
	11 - Covid-19 declared a pandemic by WHO							3 - PHE announces a reporting error in daily case numbers due to a spreadsheet error	2 - Pfizer vaccine approved for UK use	8 - Margaret Keenan from UK becomes first person in the world to be vaccinated	8 - Moderna vaccine approved for UK use
	16 - Daily Covid-19 briefings begin								29 - Nadhim Zahawi MP appointed Vaccines Minister	Oxford vaccine approved for use in the UK	11 - Publication of daily UK vaccine stats begins
LOCKDOWN AND RESTRICTIONS	23 - Nationwide lockdown announced	16 - Lockdown extended by three weeks	10 - New alert scale announced, advice pivots from 'stay home' to 'stay alert'		6 - Shielding for majority of children ends	1 - Shielding for vulnerable groups ends in England	11 - Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull restrictions come into force	1 - Tighter restrictions in NE begin	5 - Second English lockdown begins	2 - New tighter three tiered system of restrictions come into force	4 - PM announced third national lockdown
		Education, Health and Care needs assessments and plans: guidance	11 - Lockdown lifting plan announced, including plans for a phased return for schools	30 - Leicester and parts of Leicestershire go into the UK's first localised lockdown	16 - Leicester local lockdown extended	7 - Preston local lockdown comes into force	14 - 'Rule of six' comes into force	12 - Three tiers of restrictions introduced in England	23 - Three tier restrictions updated	19 - 4 th tier added to system of restrictions	5 - Third national lockdown begins. Schools largely closed
			13 - Easing of lockdown restrictions and further update to Health Protection (Coronavirus)		18 - LAs given powers to enforce local lockdowns		18 - 22 - NE restrictions and further NW come into place	31 - PM announces 4-week lockdown from 5 November		20 million people largely across the north and midlands placed in Tier 4	PM announces a phased plan to exit lockdown will be published in late Feb
					24-30 - Restrictions placed on Gt Manchester, parts of Lancs, Yorks and Luton		26 - Restrictions in Wigan, Trafford, Stockport, Blackpool plus Leeds			21-26 London, surrounding areas, Hants, Oxon and Suffolk enter Tier 4	
EDUCATION	18 - Government announces schools will close at the end of the week	20 - Oak National Academy and the BBC remote education package launches		1 - Primary schools open to a wider cohort of children in selected year groups	20 - Childcare settings allowed to fully reopen with the relaxing of 'bubble' requirements	7 - Expansion of the laptop offer to pupils who will not be able to attend school in September	1 - All schools open to all pupils	22 - New legal duty placed on schools to provide remote education comes into force	30 - Delay of in-person teaching in secondaries at the start of next term announced	14 - DfE threatens several councils with legal action for seeking to close schools early	Gov confirms summer exams are cancelled - SATs, GCSEs, AS and A Levels
	20 - Schools close to all but key worker and vulnerable children	EHCs: guidance on temporary legislative changes		1 - Nurseries open to small groups or 'bubbles' of children	24 - Face coverings mandatory indoors e.g. shops, in England	13 - A Level results day	21 - Most universities begin new academic year	DfE outlines plans for summer 2021 exams		30 - Schools contingency framework triggered in London and surrounding areas	18 - Twice weekly testing staff in primaries and nursery schools begins
	DfE confirms summer exams are cancelled			15 - Secondary schools open more widely to selected year groups		18 - A Level results reissued	26 - 1700 students from Manchester Metropolitan University told to isolate	23 - DfE reduces laptop allocations for schools			20 - Daily testing of pupils in secondary schools suspended
						20 - GCSE results day					27 - PM announces schools will remain closed until 8 March "at the earliest"

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	
LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE	3 – Government's Covid-19 action plan published	4 – Social Work Together launched	4 – NSPCC helpline and campaign announced	2 – PHE publishes 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid 19'	3 - Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Leicester) Regulations 2020 begin	5 - The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions on Gatherings) (North of England) Regs	1 – HMPPS' End of Custody Temporary Release Scheme ends	14 - The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (Medium) (England) Regulations 2020 come into force	24 – Court of Appeal win on changes to adoption and children regs	2 – NAO report on DfE's FSMs scheme in first lockdown published	2 – Trade unions consider legal action against DfE	
	19 - Family courts move to remote hearings. First tier and upper tribunals suspended	24 – Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (amendment) regulations 2020 come into force until 25	5 – Isle of Wight health and LA staff begin trialling new T&T app	13 – Parts of the updated Health Protection (Coronavirus) (England) Regs 2020 come into effect	4 - Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Number 2) (England) Regulations 2020 announced	7 - High Court challenge lawfulness of Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment)	9 – PHE launches 'Every mind matters' campaign	26 – Public Accounts Committee announces FSM inquiry	Social Work England puts all social workers who have not yet renewed their registration temporary registration under Coronavirus Act 2020	6 - The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021		
	20 - Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme announced	7 – Ofsted offer its staff for redeployment in LAs to support Covid-19 responses	12 – Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme extended until October	15 - See, hear, respond campaign led by Barnardo's announced	8 – Chancellor delivers summer statement	26 – DfE announces face coverings to be worn in some secondaries and colleges	25 – Majority of regulatory flexibilities for children's social care lapse, provisions to undertake virtual visits remain	21 – Move to extend FSMs over half term voted down				
	21 – Health Protection (Coronavirus) (England) Regulations 2020 come into force	19 – DfE announced its free devices and connectivity scheme for vulnerable learners, year 10 pupils and care leavers	1 - The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 come into force until 25 September 2020	15 - Face coverings on public transport become mandatory	13 – The remainder of Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Number 2) (England) Regs 2020 come into force			The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (High) (England) Regs 2020			The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020 comes into force	
	24 – EYFS disapplication come into force			16 – Covid summer food fund announced by the DfE				The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regs 2020 come into force				
	25 – Coronavirus Act 2020 receives Royal Assent	24 - End of custody temporary release scheme begins		23 – Daily Covid-19 briefings end, they will be held on an ad-hoc basis going forward	17 – DfE expands existing Opportunity Areas to support local pandemic recovery			The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (Very High) (England) Regulations 2020			15 – DfE announces mass testing in all secondaries in the new year	
	26 – Health Protection (Coronavirus restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 come into	22 - Health Protection (Coronavirus restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 updated		30 – PM announces plans to rebuild the UK in a speech							20 - The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (All Tiers and Obligations of Undertakings) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 come into force (Tier 4)	
	30 – Live birth registrations suspended				31 – Modifications to EHC Planning process lapse							
	Rough sleepers support package announced by MHCLG											
	INSPECTION	17 – Ofsted and HMI Probation inspections formally suspended	7 – Ofsted offer its staff for redeployment in LAs to support Covid-19 responses	27 – HMI Probation announces remote thematic YOT inspection	Health Protection (Coronavirus) (England) Regulations 2020 updated	9 – Ofsted and CQC announce new SEND area visits		1 - Ofsted inspection activity to resumes across all domains	27 – Ofsted pauses LA assurance visits to Tier 3 areas			25 – Ofsted begin inspecting RI or Inadequate schools remotely
FUNDING		11 – Budget, includes £12b measures aimed at Covid-19	£850m emergency grant for adult and children's social care announced	2 – MHCLG announce £76m for vulnerable people, including children	8 – Uplift in funding for UASCs confirmed by the Home Office	2 - £500m emergency funding for LAs announced by MHCLG	8 - £44m funding for home to school transport in the autumn term announced		19 – DfE announces £1bn catch up fund for lost learning	8- DfE announces £220m Holiday Activities Fund 2021		
		19 – MHCLG confirms £1.6b of emergency funding for LAs	18 – MHCLG confirms a further £1.6b emergency funding for LAs	19 - £37m of funding for children with SEND announced	19 – DfE announced £1b catch up fund for lost learning	21 – Chancellor launches the CSR						
	31 – Free school meals voucher scheme launched by the DfE			22 – DfE £4.3m to Oak National Academy for 2020/21								

Figure 6: Covid-19 Timeline. See www.adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/timeline

5.2 Provision of support and services

“I remember so clearly sitting in my office, I think it was about the 16th of March, a good week before we actually went into lockdown, and really thinking “How do we do our work when we can't do our work?” and this kind of sense of having understood that the most important thing about the work we do is about being with people, where they are, when they need you. But when you can't be with people and you can't be where they are, how on earth do you do it? It wasn't just a digital issue... but understanding that it is the people contact that makes the difference, that's what changes lives, and how can you do it in this way? And we have managed that. If I'm honest, I'm not one of those that says “great, we can do it all online”, because we can't”. - *South West LA*

5.2.1 Approaches

In March 2020, assessments of the impact of Covid-19 and the first national lockdown on individual children who were receiving early help or social care services were undertaken by all authorities. This included risk assessment, safety planning, responses to families and prioritising visits, in addition to ensuring the safety of staff and switching to remote working. Not all local authorities used the Regulatory easements and flexibilities granted. A significant number of respondents gave a real sense of continuing ‘business as usual’ in maintaining communication and contact with children and families, making some face-to-face visits safely, and assisting families to cope.

Respondents spoke positively about their workforce approach to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst many staff were working at home, most local authorities had established ways to work safely in the office. This applied mainly to front door teams. ASYEs and student social workers felt particularly affected by working from home and not having face-to-face access to more experienced social workers offering support. Ways to communicate with and support staff while working remotely were developed and deployed rapidly.

Respondents reported that key to keeping children and families safe and well during this time has been excellent joint working between schools and local authority children's services. This includes joint assessment of vulnerability and oversight, and regular communication, maintaining contact with vulnerable children whether they were attending school or not.

The pandemic has impacted on existing change programmes that were underway in some authorities. New models of practice, transformation programmes, and Ofsted Improvement Plans, for example, were in various stages of planning and implementation in March 2020. These were continued in some authorities, whilst others took the decision to either slow the pace or put them on hold to focus on responses to the pandemic. This appears to have been a

judgement of senior leadership teams based on the circumstances in each local area. Respondents recognised the challenges of undertaking change whilst responding to the pandemic in terms of maintaining the desired pace and outcomes.

5.2.2 Service provision

Not all services for children have been able to operate during the pandemic, especially during the first national lockdown. The reduction in school nursing and health visiting services in some local authorities at that time, as a result of the redeployment of health professionals to the acute health frontline, was felt deeply by parents and by children's services alike.

Ways to mitigate the impact of service restrictions on children and families were reported by some respondents. These include:

- Proactive campaigns raising awareness of domestic abuse, neglect, safe sleeping for babies and the importance of seeking medical attention
- Establishing additional monitoring and reviewing systems to respond to domestic abuse concerns
- Some face-to-face services and programmes, such as parenting support, moved to a virtual delivery model in some areas
- Community and greater asset-based approaches as a response to the pandemic have been enabling, with communities and agencies coming together to provide a proactive preventative response to families
- Early help offer flexed to provide additional parenting support virtually for parents struggling during lockdown
- The role played by head teachers, heads of early years settings and school staff who sought to provide comprehensive support to children and families during and post lockdown arrangements
- The closure of some residential short break provision during this period has meant that children with disabilities have been supported through flexible and creative outreach, but with recognition that for these families the provision of support it has been more difficult to maintain during the pandemic.

"Families who probably would have needed very little from us in the past definitely needed us much more and that's proved challenging in terms of that disability resource." - North East LA

- Creating a multi-disciplinary post-lockdown trauma pathway shared by all professionals to make sure that children receive the right levels of support at the right time from the right agency when they came out of lockdown
- Some of the biggest challenges have been for children in care maintaining contact with their birth families. Where it is not possible for families to use technology, ensuring there is a safe method of face-to-face participation with the appropriate use of PPE. Blended approaches of face-to-face, 'socially distanced' and virtual contact and support were common.

"The requirement to carry out safeguarding visits and direct observations did not cease during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although some virtual and 'garden gate' contact was introduced to support children and families, this did not wholly satisfy the need to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children who have been, or continue to be, at risk of harm. This was difficult for the service at times, as some social workers were unable to undertake home visits due to needing to self-isolate. The number of individuals affected fluctuated but was generally around 10% to 13% of the workforce unavailable at any one time. It is therefore positive that we were able to report on the 17th June that: 95% of all children on a child in need plan; 100% of all children on a protection plan; and 87% of all children in our care, had received direct contact with their social worker within the previous 4 weeks". *North East LA*

5.2.3 Virtual versus face-to-face

Respondents report both the benefits and challenges of virtual working. At the start of the pandemic, social workers and early help professionals spent a lot of time sorting out IT for children and families to enable connectivity.

Case conferences, reviews, meetings, visits, court hearings and provision of support continued via virtual platforms. This resulted in better attendance by professionals, including GPs, as it was easier to participate remotely in case conferences and reviews, without travel time. Respondents provided examples of how children and families were supported to engage virtually, for example where social workers and parents join some virtual meetings such as Court hearings socially distanced but together so that face-to-face support is maintained for parents who may require it.

Lack of access to reliable technology and connectivity, together with 'not knowing what is happening behind the camera' can carry additional problems. Digital isolation became a barrier for a small proportion of children and families such as parents with learning disability, children with a disability, in areas of poor connectivity or no/limited hardware for members of a household.

Those respondents who had elicited views and experiences from children and families about virtual working, found that on the whole young people do want face-to-face interactions with their worker rather than online all the time.

“But actually, there are some things that you can't do without going and visiting families, particularly neglect. We definitely had some children in need families where neglect escalated in the first period of lockdown, for example, on an MSTeams video call, the house looked okay and mum sounded okay, but when the worker went to the house, she saw and smelt it, then it really wasn't.” - *East LA*

5.3 Presenting needs

Section 14 of this report provides information about the presenting needs of children and families over the past two years and the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Respondents stated that referrals to social care during this period reflected more complex needs. More children were referred who were not previously known to social care services. Families who were just about managing pre-pandemic and would not normally come to the attention of social care, were now in need of significant help. More children were presenting at a later stage, once issues were complex and entrenched, and then immediately becoming subjects of child protection plans or proceedings.

Only a small number of authorities experienced an increase in families receiving Section 17 funds during the Covid-19 pandemic, but nearly half reported an increase in telephone enquiries for food parcels and practical support. Advice and information were provided, generally signposting to co-ordinated community support hubs and foodbanks. These enquiries were not recorded as a contact or referral to children's services.

There is a sense that early help and social care services are helping some children and families they are working with during the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain a steady state, and not deteriorate further, rather than progressing positive change for families. For some families, we heard how they have thrived as their previously chaotic lifestyles were 'simplified'. In a small number of cases social distancing and limited interventions and services have potentially resulted in needs becoming worse and therefore requiring a higher level of intervention, with cases remaining open for longer than would have been necessary previously.

Recovery and renewal as we learn to live with Covid-19 will require remedial action and reprofiling of resources to meet the emotional and mental health needs of a generation of children and young people to redress lost learning.

6 Early Help

6.1 National context

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (DfE, 2020b) states that “*Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life*”. Whilst there is no legislative basis for early help, this guidance outlines duties for all partners in identifying, assessing and providing a comprehensive range of early help services as part of a continuum of support.

The current framework for the inspections of local authority children’s services (Ofsted, 2018) provides 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*”.

Unlike adult social care where The Care Act 2014 puts preventative work with adults on a statutory footing, there is no *legislative* requirement for local authority children’s services to provide preventative services. Six years ago, Ofsted stated: *It is only right that local authorities and their partners are focusing increasingly on early help and prevention services for families. Many are now establishing a more coordinated and structured approach to this crucial role* (Ofsted 2015). Whilst the non-statutory basis of early help allows flexible local solutions to be developed in response to demand, it does mean reliance on discretionary funding which in turn depends on local leaders prioritising early help at a time when other significant pressures and services are vying for dwindling resources.

6.2 Early help strategy and services

Safeguarding Pressures research has explored early help strategies, provision and activity since 2012 (ADCS, 2012). During this period, services and approaches have matured. Delivery by local authorities or other agencies within the local area varies. Multi-disciplinary services, joint pathways and single point of contact, generally with social care, are increasingly more common. During this period, the funding challenges experienced by many authorities have been significant. There is evidence in phase 7 of this research that there is re-investment in early help in authorities which had previously experienced significant cuts as part of budget savings. And in some local authorities, the continued determination of local politicians to fund early help services has prevented their decimation.

All respondents see early help and increases in provision of support below the threshold of social care as a good thing, asserting that early help can secure positive change for children and families, and reduce demand for social care and other specialist services. However, a number of respondents highlighted the difficulty in demonstrating this, as social care activity continues to rise. Clearly 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 children and families to improve wellbeing and life chances.

Historically, early help services have provided support for families who do not meet the threshold for social work intervention, or are ready to be stepped down from a social work team. More authorities now appear to be providing an integrated model of practice, where early help workers actively support social work teams in their day-to-day work, delivering interventions with families alongside qualified social workers.

The term 'early help' is used to describe a broad and varied range of services provided to children and families, including:

- Parenting groups and classes
- Family support in the home
- Child development and early years support
- Relationship support for parents and for whole families
- A range of programmes, interventions, therapeutic and practical support, such as specialist adolescent services, social emotional mental health (SEMH) pathways, substance misuse services and behaviour change programmes.

The range of needs addressed by early help services also varies significantly across the country and changes over time in any given authority. Some authorities provide both services designed to meet specific family needs, such as domestic abuse programmes, and more generic family support. Services can be age-specific, such as school readiness, or adolescent conflict management, while others are targeted at whole families and focus on family dynamics and relationships. Services have also been developed to respond to particular needs in their local context, such as a team to support new arrivals into a city with high levels of inward migration.

Many authorities report undertaking service transformation in the last two years, introducing new services, merging early help and public health services, shifting the arrangements for delivery. Some authorities report that early help assessments and support are mostly provided by partner agencies, while others include help provided through "self-serve" online resources as part of their early help offer. Other examples from local authorities include:

- The Families First service provides alternative evidence-based interventions to young people and their families through a wide range of whole-family therapeutic interventions, including those subjects of child protection plans and on the edge of care. A restructure of the service is planned this year which will redesign the service to accommodate a No Wrong Door model. This represents a commitment to services for vulnerable families. However, funding for the early help service has reduced by around 30% in the last two years, putting the project at risk
- In-house 'invest to save' provision: Adolescent support unit; edge of care offer; Revive offer with two clinical psychologists to support and advise social workers, parents, carers and to assess more complex cases; family support and trained play therapist; early help and support to manage the early help assessment (EHA) process and to support social workers with specific pieces of work within the assessment and safeguarding teams; run relevant groups across the continuum of need to support and inform assessments and packages of support
- Over the past five years, the provision of early help by the local authority has reduced with the focus of children's centres being shifted to the most deprived areas and a reduction in the early help support provided directly by the council. Partner agencies, especially schools, are being supported to develop responses that replace this from within their existing resource allocations. Although where this works well, it ensures that local solutions are developed, there is a risk that early help is not prioritised leading to a more costly statutory intervention being required at a future point, the cost of which would fall to the authority.

The strength of the partnership relationship, funding, and visionary leadership appear to be key enablers for the design, provision and outcomes of early help services. There is no 'right way' to provide early help and the flexibility to develop and adapt approaches contrasts significantly with children's social care, which is rigidly defined in statute, albeit with creative and flexible models of practice emerging within it.

6.3 Early help activity

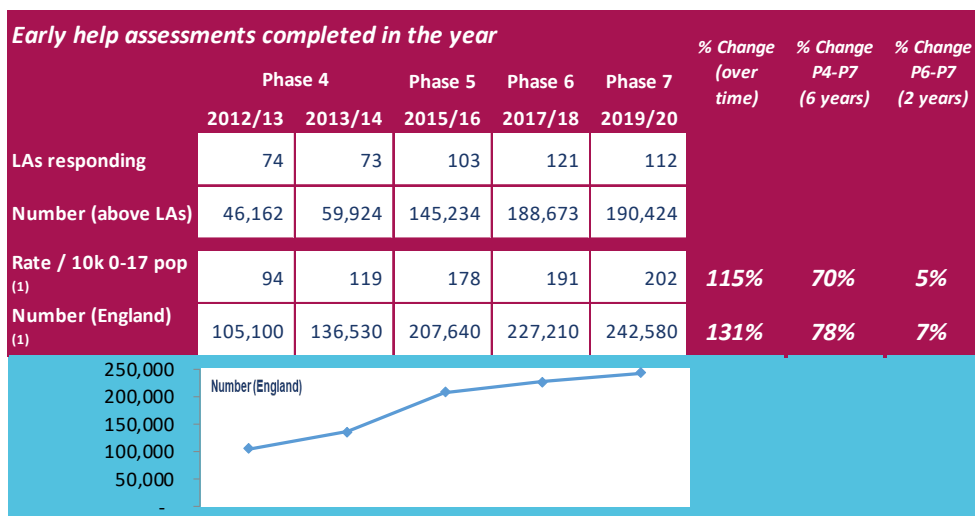


Figure 7: Summary of early help assessments completed in the year. (Note 1) The England number is extrapolated from local authority responses based on proportion of England population

112 authorities reported a total of 190,424 early help assessments completed during 2019/20. This equates to a rate of 202 per 10,000 of the 0-17 population and extrapolates to 242,580 across all England. This represents a 131% increase in the number of early help assessments completed since the data were first collected in 2012/13, and a 7% increase in the past two years.

Data on the number of cases open to early help have been collected since Phase 6 of this research. 101 authorities reported 138,248 cases open to early help at 31st March 2020, equivalent to a rate of 165 per 10,000 of the 0-17 population. This equates to 197,850 extrapolated to all England, an increase of 20% in the two years.

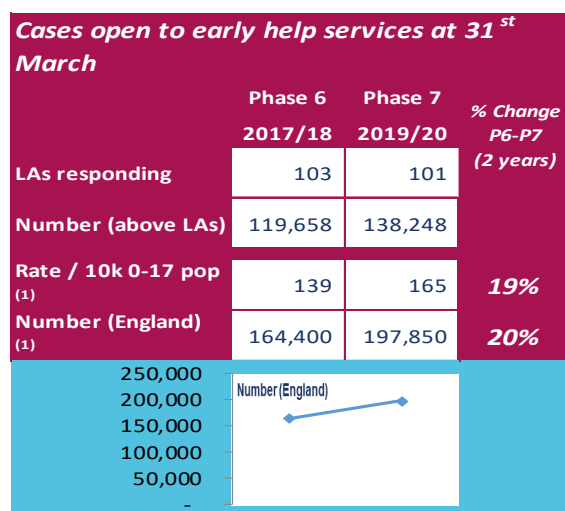


Figure 8: Summary of cases open to early help at 31st March. (Note 1) as previous figure

In qualitative responses, 82% of the 56 respondents who quantified change stated that they had experienced an increase in early help activity, compared to 78% in Phase 6.

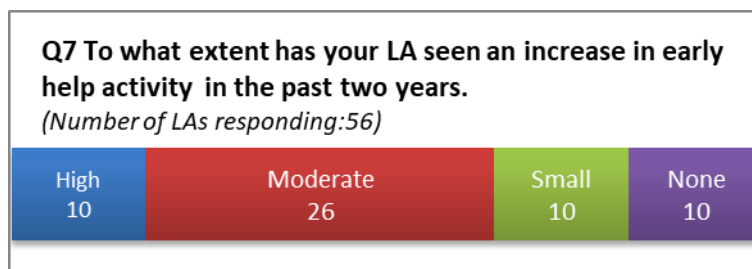


Figure 9: Qualitative question scale responses

Considerations about these data relating to either recording or practice are provided below:

Recording:

- While our data request was for the number of unique children receiving assessments and support, in instances where respondents included the numbers of families, it was not possible to identify if the assessment related to a household or the individual child within a household. There are variations in age ranges reported from 0-17, and 0-19. It is therefore likely that the numbers reported here are an under-representation
- Absence of nationally agreed definitions and local practice mean that for most local authorities, the number of open early help cases are those open to local authority early help provision **only** and not cases that may be open to partner agencies. The variety of local definitions makes it difficult to see trends over time within individual authorities, or to compare early help activity between authorities
- Local authorities reported changes in their case management systems resulting in either data cleansing or changes in reporting. In these cases, data were able to be included as part of a snapshot, but not able to be included in the year-on-year analysis. Eight of the 112 authorities specifically mentioned changes in system affecting recording definitions, and we expect that in reality this is higher.

Practice:

- Better identification at the point of contact through improved front door arrangements, such as single MASH or hubs for social care and early help were evident
- Improved awareness in partner agencies of early help services and how to refer (leading to increases), or increased confidence in partner agencies to deliver early help themselves (leading to decreases). In some places, this change was being driven by active training and support for universal services to understand thresholds and their responsibilities. Provision of early help support by other agencies makes it more challenging to have an overview of how much help is being provided and to whom
- Improved awareness in the community through outreach and promotional work, leading to more self-referrals from families
- Decrease in availability of support from the voluntary sector and a decrease in pastoral services in schools, putting more demand onto early help
- Partner agencies providing information to the local authority about the early help assessments they are completing varies between authorities. There are no standardised criteria for doing so
- Several early help assessments can be associated with a single child or family.

Analysis of the reasons for involvement, and the presenting needs of children and families in early help services are provided in section 14.

Covid-19 period: April to September 2020

Whilst there are no in-year early help data, respondents report mixed effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on early help referrals and services. There are some reports of increased self-referrals and referrals from the police during the first lockdown, particularly in respect of domestic abuse. Others report a decrease in referrals largely due to school closures from mid-March to early June. While referrals and new assessments fell for some authorities, early help caseloads remained high as part of the community-based response to the pandemic and because families were being supported for longer.

7 'The Front Door' to Children's Services

7.1 National context and policy

Statutory core processes and children's social care functions relating to referral, assessment and children in need have not changed significantly since The Children Act 1989, apart from changing initial and core assessments to a single social work assessment in 2014. The latest guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018* (DfE, 2020b) sets out in detail the responsibilities of all partners and the local authority to safeguard children. How local authorities discharge these duties has been subject to change in many responding authorities. The findings below illustrate changes to the 'front door' over time.

7.2 Thresholds for children's social care

Thresholds for statutory interventions are set in legislation and described in statutory guidance. However, the application and interpretation of thresholds and the management of risk and support at the point of transfer to other services such as 'step up/step down' to early help services, varies between authorities. 97 authorities provided commentary about thresholds, of which 62 quantified changes. 48% of these authorities stated that there have not been changes to the thresholds impacting on either early help or safeguarding services in the past two years in their authority, which is in line with phase 6 responses.

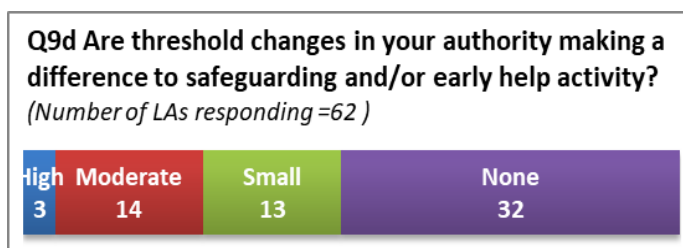


Figure 10: Qualitative question scale responses

Those who had reviewed thresholds in the last two years had generally done so as part of service redesign which included clearer pathways through early help and social care, and/or creating multi-agency hubs. More authorities reported an improvement in partner agencies' understanding of thresholds and their application of them. Although numbers are still small, more than previously are moving away from the idea of 'thresholds' which, they state, inadvertently link to service boundary criteria and not to the needs of children. The models in these authorities are centred on conversations.

"We are using the Professor Thorpe model of conversation based front door. I have to be honest when I first picked it up I thought we could spend a long time and a lot of money on this kind of conversation based model, but actually it's really very tight, and they're doing it very well. Dip sampling suggests the thresholds are spot on, and it's working incredibly well for us." - South West LA

7.3 Initial contacts

Initial contacts and information about the presenting issues in initial contacts are not reported nationally as other activity is, as it is below the threshold for social care. This is obviously a significant amount of activity for local authority children's services which is not captured in national statistics.

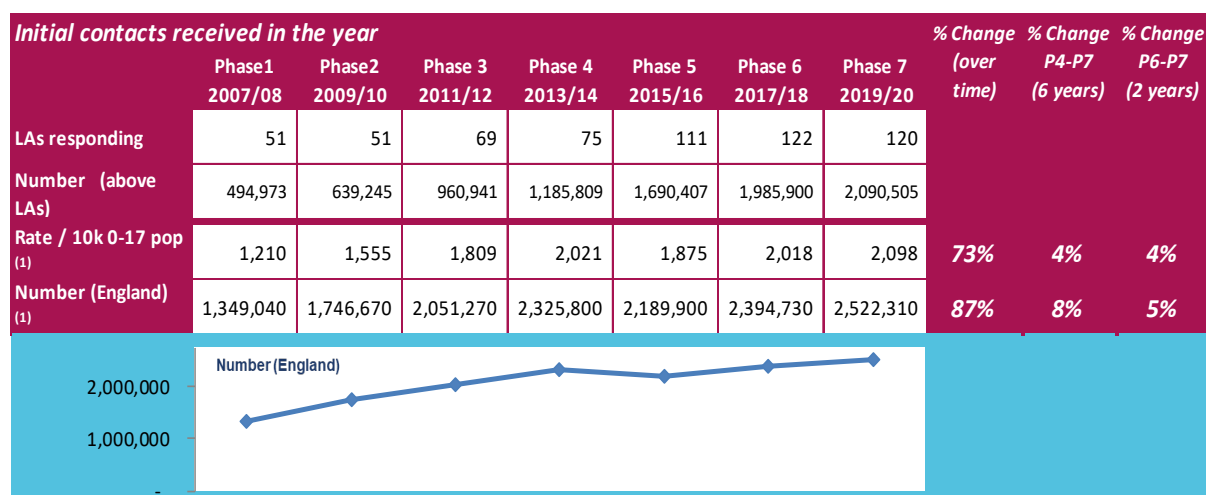


Figure 11: Initial contacts summary. (Note 1) extrapolated from SGP7 research data

120 local authorities provided data indicating a rate of 2,098 initial contacts per 10,000 0-17 population. Extrapolating the number from responding local authorities to the whole of England would indicate that 2.52 million initial contacts were received in 2019/20, an 87% increase since 2007/8 and 5% increase in the last two years. We don't know how many children this represents, as some children will have been subjects of multiple contacts during the year. We can surmise that this is an average of 6,910 contacts a day received by children's services 'front door' arrangements.

Of the 97 authorities which supplied data in both phase 6 and phase 7 of this research, 44 (45%) reported a reduction in number of initial contacts and 53 (54%) reported an increase. Of the five authorities with the highest rates, 20% were due to increased demand following the publication of an Ofsted judgement of ‘inadequate’ and authorities reporting changes to their case management system. It is clear from the narrative provided that there is greater diversity through a single point of contact such as a MASH or joint hubs which accounts for the variation across authorities in what is considered an initial contact.

7.4 Referrals

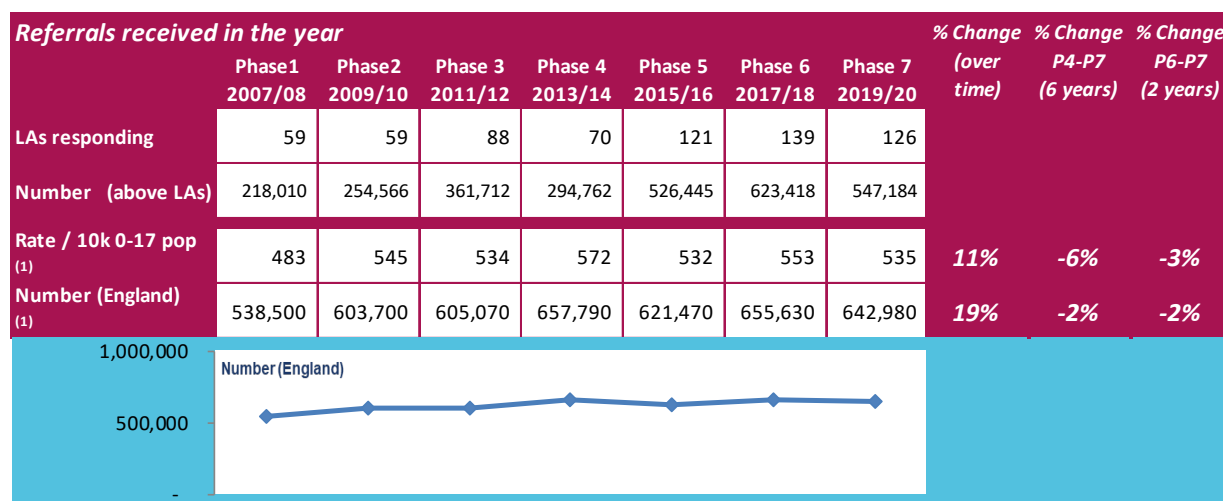


Figure 12: Referrals summary. (Note 1) Source for rate and number (England) are from DfE statistical publications and therefore represent the whole country (DfE, 2020)

There has been an overall increase of 19% in the number of referrals since 2007/8 but a reduction in the past two years of 2%. The rate and changes over the years mask significant disparity between local authorities. Of the 126 local authorities providing data to phase 7 of this research, the range is considerable. The lowest referral rate in 2019/20 was 197 per 10,000 0-17 population (an Eastern Region authority) and the highest referral rate was 1,307 (a North West authority). Of the 118 authorities which provided data in phase 6 and phase 7, 62 (53%) reported a decrease and 56 (47%) reported an increase in referrals.

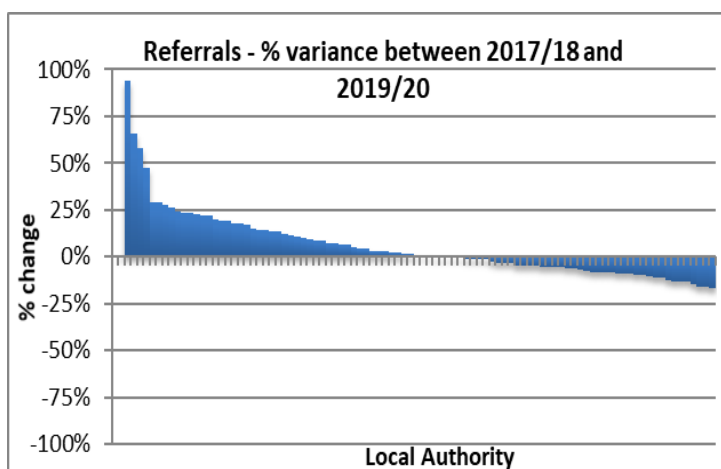


Figure 13: Referrals - % variance 2017/18 and 2019/20 (Source: SGP data)

7.5 Source of contacts and referrals

Police continue to be the biggest source of contacts, with the number (and proportion of the total) from health and education increasing incrementally over the years. Although the number of contacts has increased overall, the proportion by parent/carer/family member has reduced from 14.2% of all initial contacts to 8.4%. The reasons behind this are not clear, but potential hypotheses are: professionals are identifying and referring issues earlier on behalf of the family, or that there are parents/carers who do not know the pathway to get support and there is unmet need.

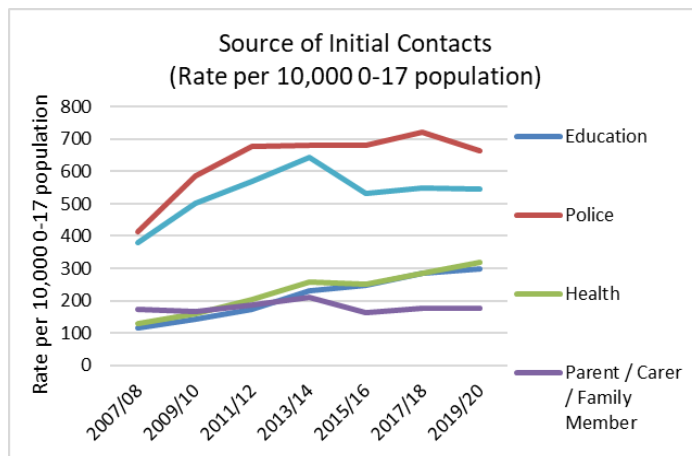


Figure 14: Rate of initial contacts by source - trend

There is little change in some referral sources in the past two years. The proportion from health is the same as in 2007/8. (14.7% in responding authorities). Police remain the highest source of referrals (28.9%), followed by Education (19.9%). The latter has increased significantly from 11.7% (2007/08) to 19.9% (2019/20). As with contacts, parent/carer /family member referrals are reducing from 14.2% (2007/08) to 5.8% (2019/20).

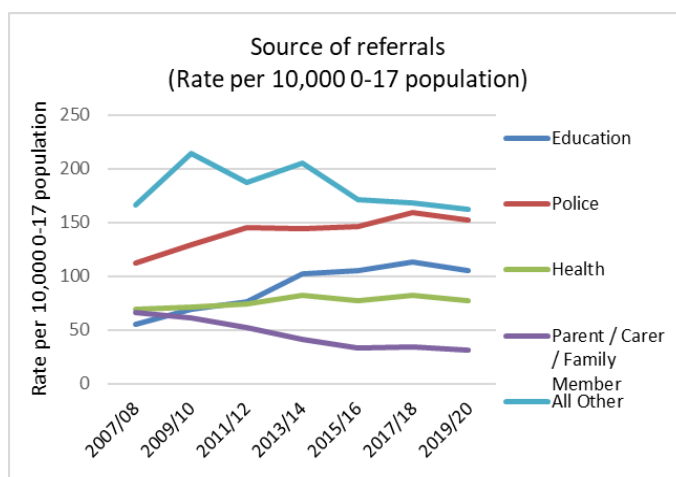


Figure 15: Rate of referrals by source - trend

A more detailed breakdown of the source of referrals in 2019/20 (figure below) illustrates that primary health services and A&E departments are the two biggest components of health referrals. Indeed, referrals from A&E alone outstrip those from school nurses, health visitors and GPs combined.

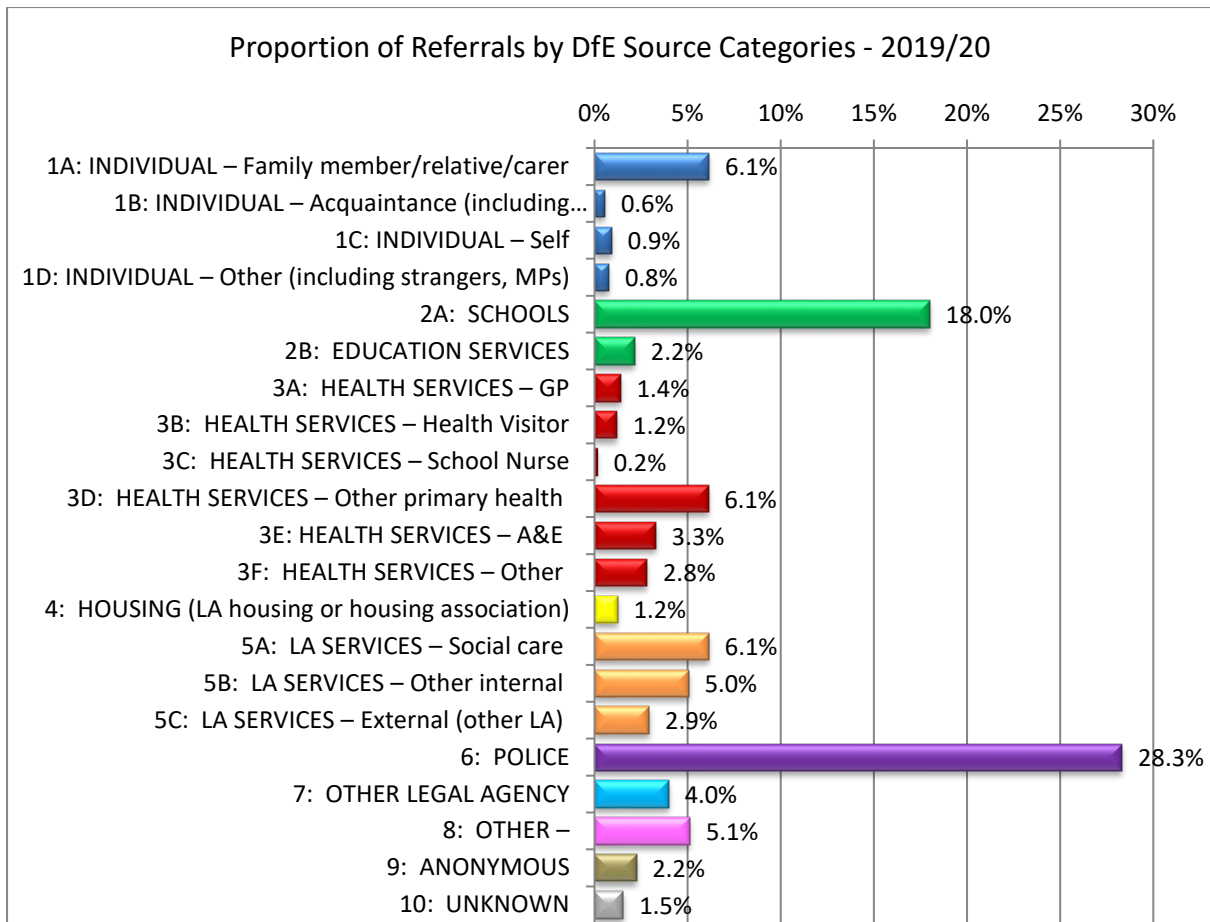
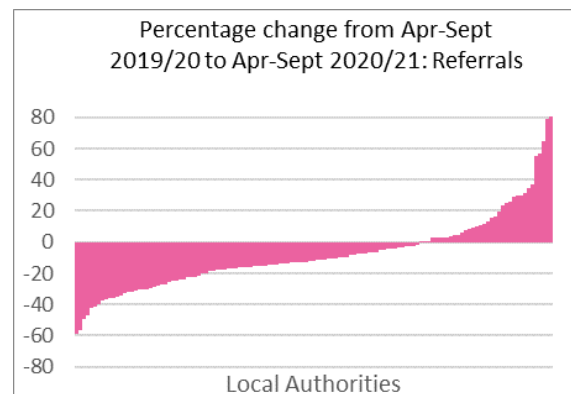
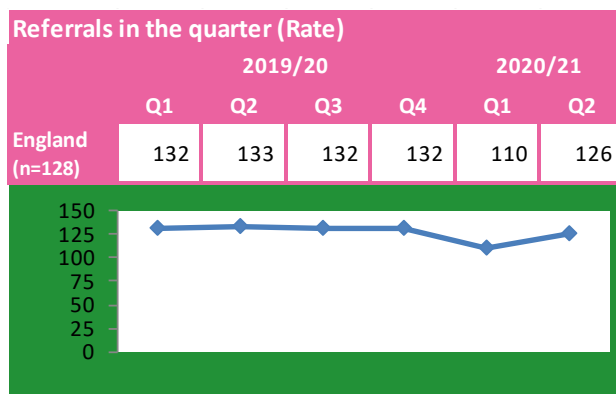


Figure 16: Referrals by source 2019/20, DfE categories.

We asked local authorities if there is any particular referrer where more referrals have an outcome of ‘no further action’ than other referrers. Just under half of the authorities responding reported that Police referrals were the highest where no further action was the outcome.

Covid-19 period: April to September 2020



Figures 17 & 18 : Rate of referrals per 10,000 0-17 population by quarter and % change between Q2 2019/20 and Q2 2020/21. Source: Regional common core dataset. Only includes 128 LAs with data for all quarters.

The number of referrals extrapolated to all England between April to September 2020 is 284,375.

The majority of respondents report a reduction in referrals in the first quarter of 2020/21 (April to June) and slowly picking up, as shown above. Reasons include closure of schools, (schools are traditionally the second largest source of referrals). Police and family/community referrals increased during the first six months of the year, referring some of the children and families that would ordinarily have come via schools. Case study respondents and interviewees commented that a surge in referrals took place from October onwards for some authorities, whilst others saw referrals return to their normal levels.

8 Children in Need

8.1 Assessments

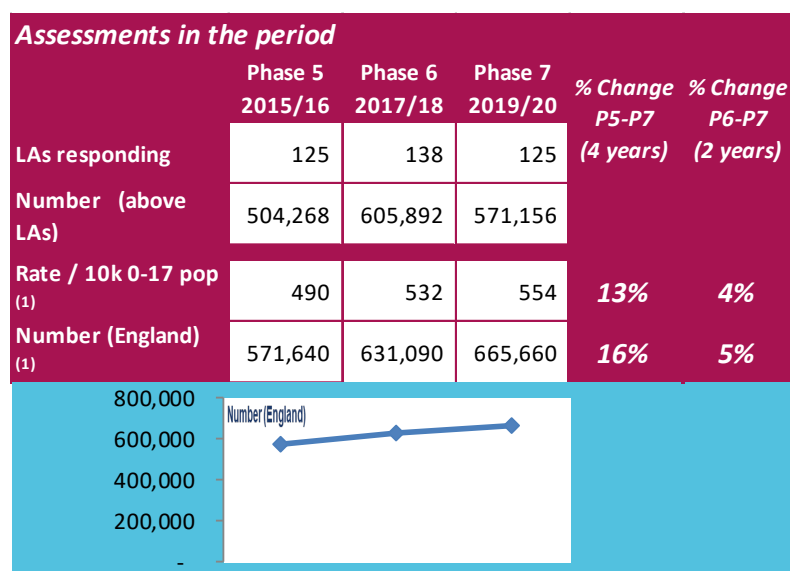


Figure 19: Summary single assessments completed in the year. (Note 1) Source: DfE (2020)

Social care assessments changed between 2013 and 2014, and reporting is therefore only available from 2014/15 onwards. The number of assessments in England increased by 5% in the last two years to 665,660 (a rate of 554 per 10,000 0-17 population). Variations between authorities in the proportion of referrals that lead to assessment, and assessments undertaken vary significantly.

Outcomes and factors in assessment correlated to factors in other safeguarding activity are provided in section 14.

8.2 Children in Need

A child in need is defined under The Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of children's social care services, or the child is disabled. Nationally published data include those who are subjects of child protection plans or looked after.

8.2.1 Children in need (including child protection and children looked after)

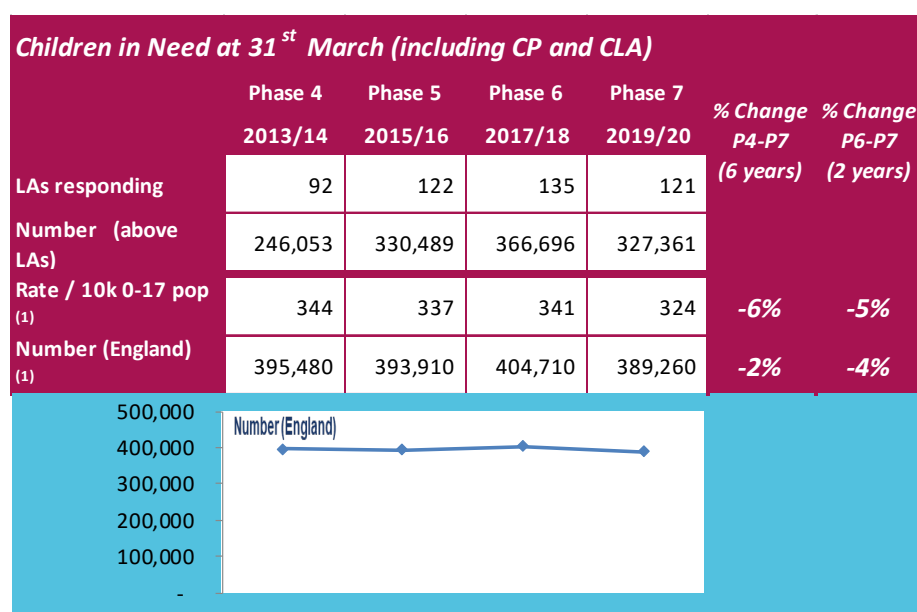


Figure 20: Children in Need summary – children in need including children subject of a child protection plan or children looked after. (Note 1) Source: DfE (2020).

There were 389,260 children in need at 31st March 2020, a reduction of 4% in the last two years. Again, the England average masks significant variation between local authorities, in addition to the greater volume of activity in-year. 753,840 children in need episodes across the year involving 705,060 children indicates more accurately the extent of children's needs and the volume of work that is undertaken with children and their families during the year rather than a snapshot at 31st March (DfE, 2020)

115 respondents report a range from 177 to 870 children in need per 10,000 0-17 population at 31st March against the England average of 324. 30% of respondents did not experience a reduction.

8.2.2 Children in need (excluding child protection and children looked after)

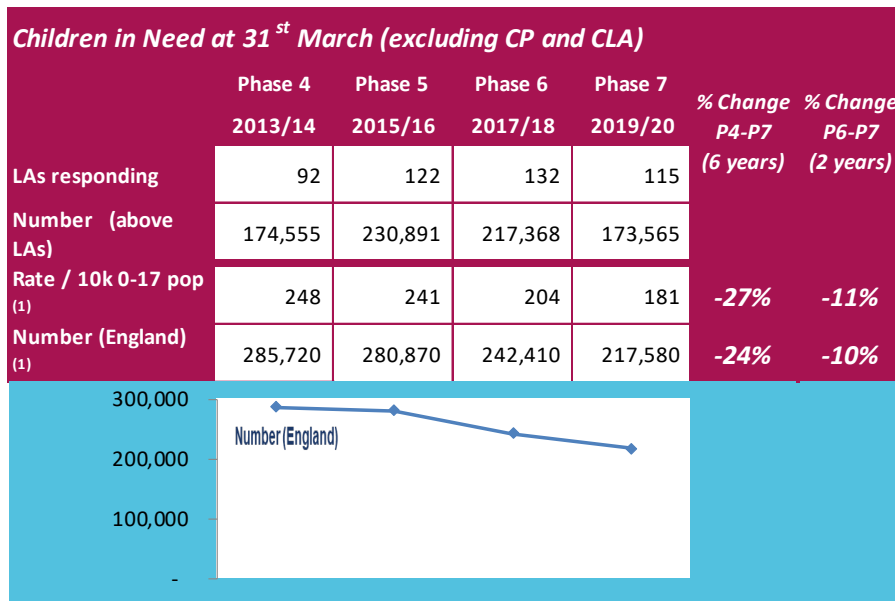


Figure 21: Children in Need summary – children in need who are NOT subject of a child protection plan or looked after (i.e. S17 only). (Note 1) extrapolated numbers are based on SGP7 respondents data

There is a more significant decrease in the number of children in need at 31st March excluding those who are subjects of child protection plans or looked after. Respondents have experienced a 10% decrease in the number of children in need over the past two years, indicating that the number of children in need who are not subjects of child protection plans or looked after is decreasing at a greater rate.

The difference for individual authorities of their rate of children in need including child protection and looked after against their rate of children in need excluding child protection and looked after is illustrated here.

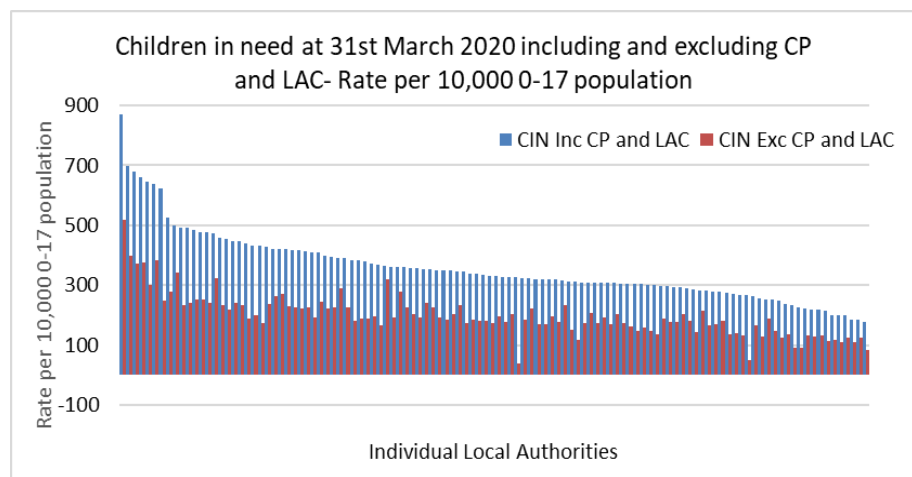


Figure 22: Children in Need at 31st March 2020.

Each local authority is represented by two columns – a blue column which indicates the number including CP and LAC, the red column is children in need only. The blue 'gap' above the red columns are therefore those which are children in need only.

8.2.3 Children in need with a disability

There has been very little change in the proportion of children in need who have a disability (DfE, 2020). 47,190 children in need at 31st March 2020 (12.6%) were recorded as having a disability. There were more children with a learning disability (42%), autism/aspergers syndrome (34%) and challenging behaviour (20%) than other types of disability. The Eastern region has had the highest recorded proportion of children with a disability for the past three years.

Covid-19 pandemic: April to September 2020

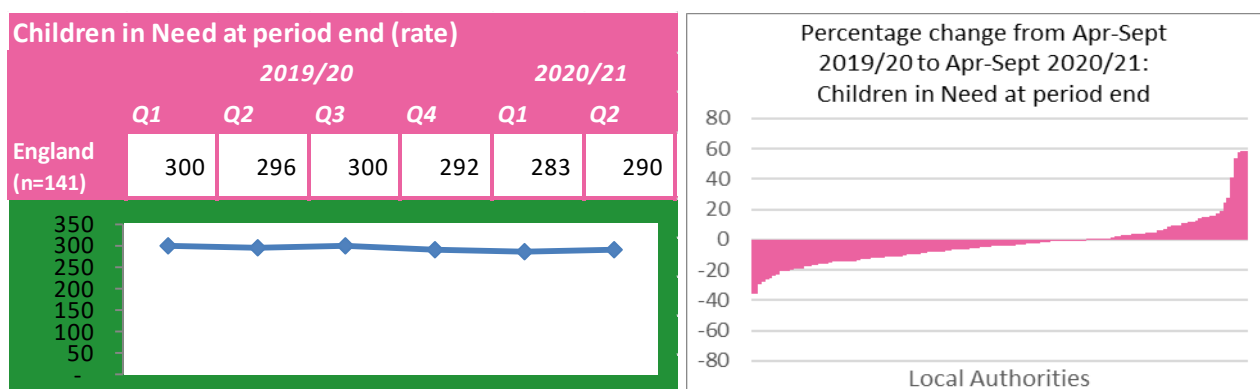


Figure 23 and 24: Children in need (including CP and LAC) by quarter to September 2020 and percentage change. Source: regional datasets. Only includes LAs with data for all quarters.

According to regional data, there are 2% fewer children in need at 30th September 2020 compared to the same period last year, against a rising number of children subjects of child protection plans and children looked after.

Respondents describe keeping cases open for longer during the pandemic. The fluctuation in the rate of children in need at the end of each quarter could be explained by the reduction in referrals and therefore assessments being undertaken (therefore fewer newly opened children in need cases).

9 Child Protection

9.1 Section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences

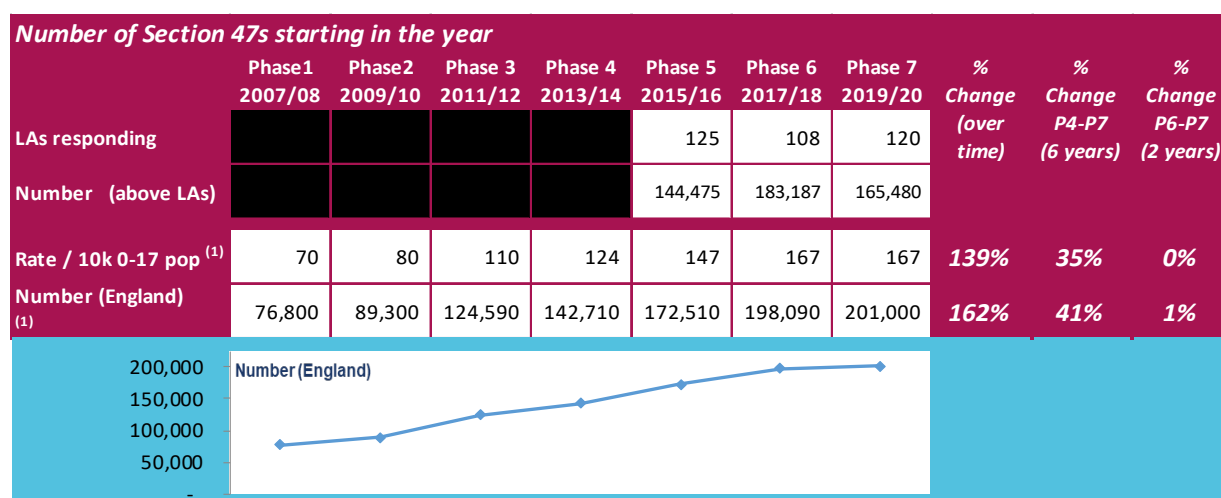


Figure 25: Summary section 47 enquiries. (Note 1) Source: DfE (2020).

There were 201,000 Section 47 enquiries undertaken in England in 2019/20, an increase of 1% in the last two years (DfE, 2020) which reflects a levelling off of the significant increase of previous years.

More detailed data provided by the 109 respondents for both phase 6 and phase 7 of Safeguarding Pressures research, illustrate that variations between authorities continues. 73 (67%) authorities reported an increase of which 37 (34%) reported more than 25% increase. 36 (33%) authorities reported a decreased number of S47 enquiries.

9.2 Child protection plans

9.2.1 Children becoming subjects of child protection plans

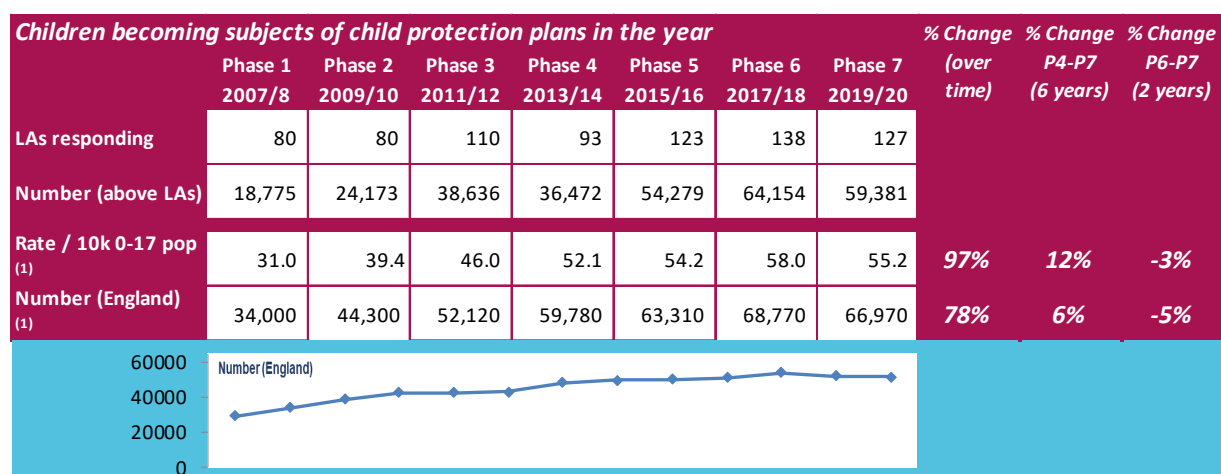


Figure 26: Children becoming subjects of plans summary. (Note 1) Source: DfE (2020)

The year-on-year increase in the number of children becoming subjects of child protection plans has plateaued. 66,970 children became subjects of child protection plans during 2019/20 in England, a 5% reduction on two years ago (DfE, 2020). This is equivalent to a rate of 55.2 for 10,000 0-17 population.

The differences between authorities continues to be evident. Of the 118 respondents providing data for phases 6 and 7, the lowest rate was 16 (a London LA) and the highest rate was 156 (a North West LA). 53 respondents (45%) reported an increase and 65 (55%) reported a decrease.

9.2.2 Children subjects of child protection plans at 31st March

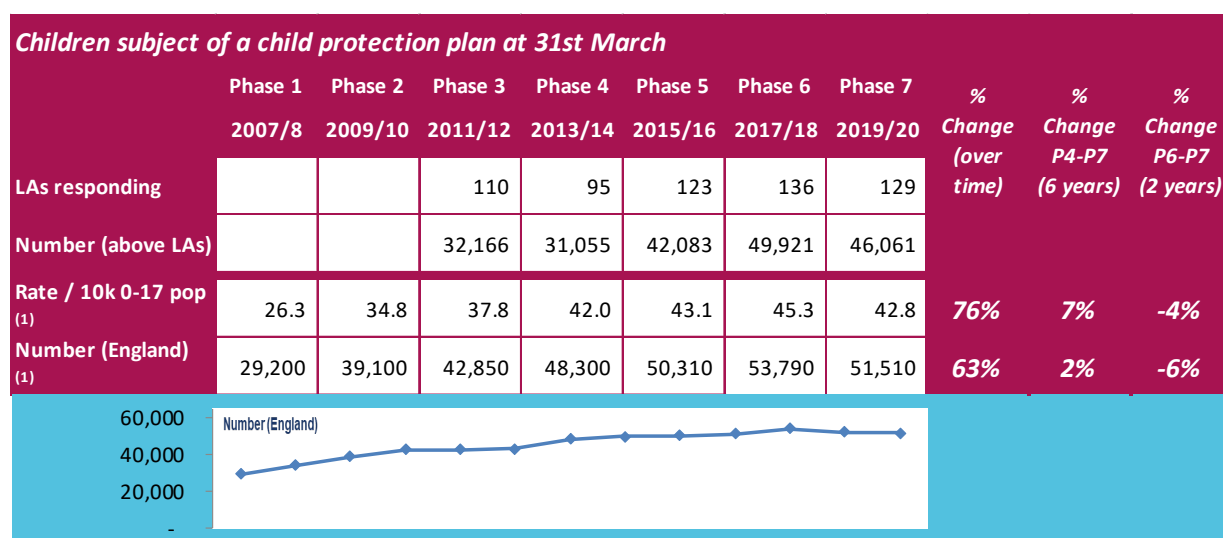


Figure 27: Child subjects of child protection plans at 31st March summary. (Note 1) Source: DfE (2020)

51,510 children were subjects of child protection plans in England at 31st March 2020, a rate of 42.8 per 10,000 0-17 population (DfE, 2020). The number has started to decrease after a decade of a rising trend.

Safeguarding Pressures data evidences a significant range and change between local authorities which is masked by the England average. Of the 118 respondents providing detailed data in both phases 6 and 7, 45% reported an increase and 55% had reported a decrease. Rates per 10,000 0-17 population ranged from 11 (London LA) to 124 (North West LA).

9.2.3 Children ceasing to be subjects of child protection plans

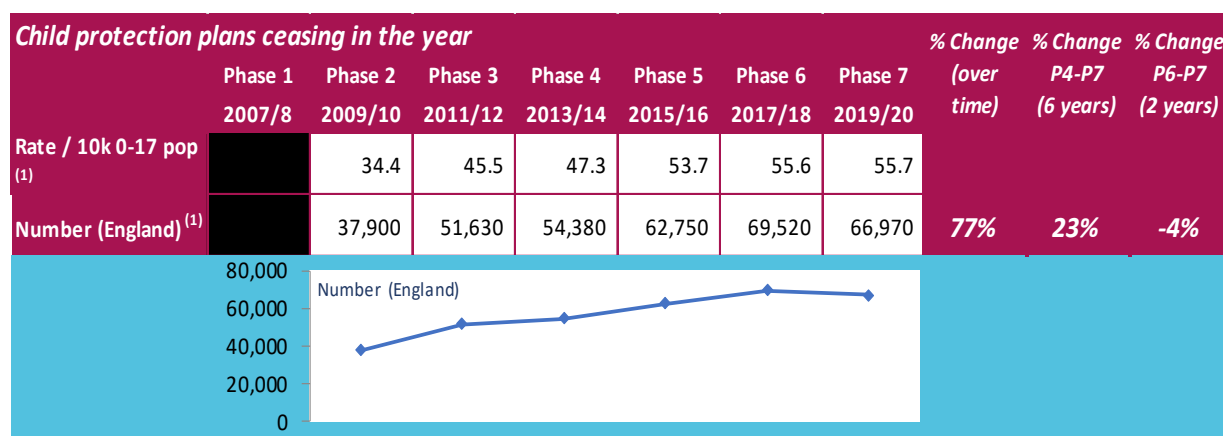
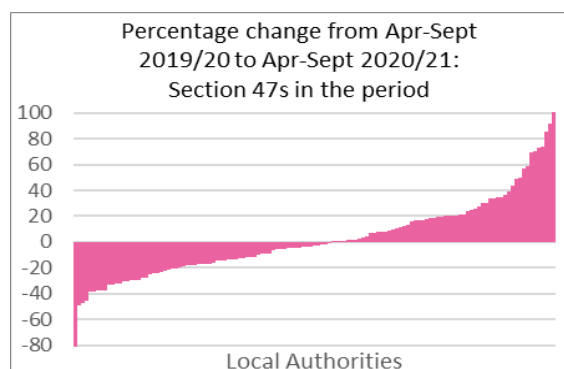
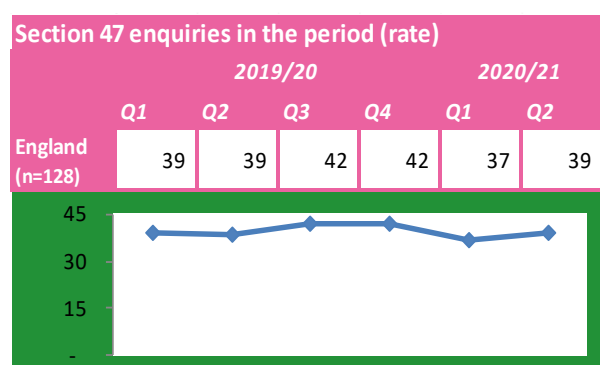


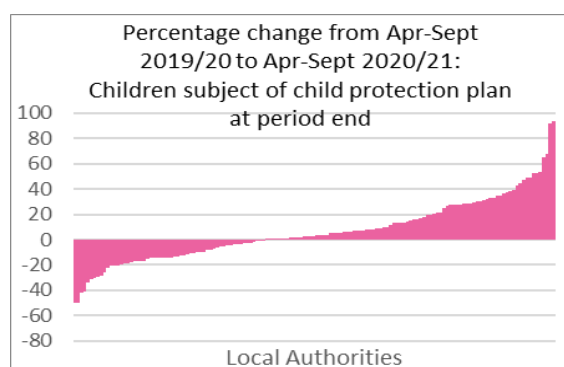
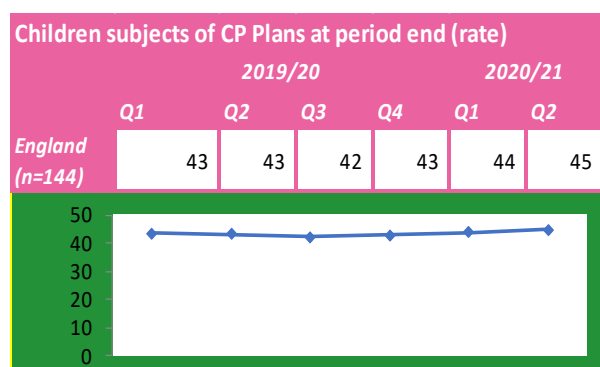
Figure 28: Children ceasing to be subjects of child protection plans summary. (Note 1) Source: DfE (2020)

There were 66,970 child protection plans ceasing in 2019/20, a rate of 55.7 per 10,000 0-17 population and a reduction from two years ago. This represents a slight downturn in what has been a steady trajectory over a decade of increasing numbers of children no longer subjects of child protection plans.

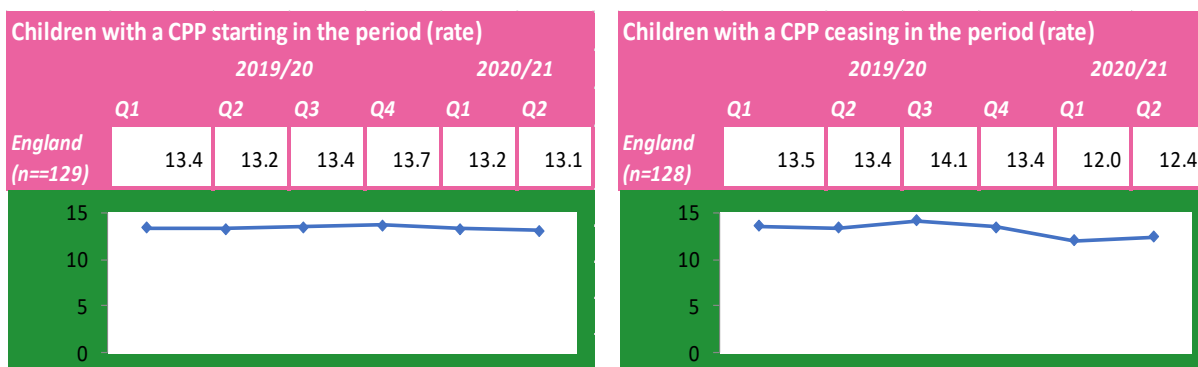
Covid-19 period: April to September 2020



Figures 29, 30: S47 enquiries in the period by quarter, and percentage change September 2020. Source: regional datasets. Only includes LAs with data for all quarters.



Figures 31, 32: children subject of child protection plan at period end by quarter, and percentage change September 2020. Source: regional datasets. Only includes LAs with data for all quarters.



Figures 33, 34: children starting and ceasing to be subject of child protection plans by quarter to September 2020
Source: regional datasets. Only includes LAs with data for all quarters.

The number of Section 47 enquiries extrapolated to all England between April to September 2020 is **90,700**. Regional quarterly data indicate that overall, 2.6% fewer Section 47 enquiries were started in England in Quarter 2 2020/21 compared to the same period last year.

The number of children subjects of child protection plans at 30th September 2020 extrapolated to all England is **53,800**. 4% more children were subjects of child protection plans at 30th September 2020 compared to the same period last year.

Local authorities reported an increase in children becoming subjects of child protection plans during the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Respondents and interviewees described how some children referred were quickly made subjects of plans, and fewer children were removed from plans. In some areas, child protection conference members were reluctant to remove children from those plans due to anxiety about the lived experiences of some children deteriorating through the pandemic, but also that interventions and support, such as mediation, drug and alcohol services, and third sector services were not operating fully and therefore ability to sustain change was a concern.

9.3 Child safeguarding reviews

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (DfE, 2020b) introduced changes to the way child safeguarding reviews are undertaken. A third of authorities responding reported an increase in serious incidents and notifications in the past two years. No authority reported that reviews had diminished, but for most authorities none or a very small number of reviews are undertaken. 76% predicted that there would be change, the extent to which additional safeguarding concerns due to hidden harm will become more evident as children become once again more visible as the pandemic eases, is as yet unknown.

“As the impacts of the pandemic and recession are felt it is anticipated we will see an increase in all types of reviews. Increased financial stress on families, coupled with families having less access to coping mechanisms for tension (exercise, friends, social outings) is predicted to increase incidents of domestic abuse nationally. The same stresses can also lead to increase in neglect/abuse and exploitation of children. It is impossible to put even an approximate estimation to what this could look like locally”. -South East LA

Ofsted reports an increase in the number of children killed or seriously injured during the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Between April and September 2020, Ofsted received 285 serious incident notifications, 27% higher than the same period in 2019/20. More than a third (35.8%) of incidents relate to a child under one compared with 30.4% in the previous quarter (DfE, 2020). Some respondents reported experiencing an increase in non-accidental injuries to babies since March 2020. Injury of non-mobile babies is a subject of a National Child Safeguarding Panel review.

10 Court and Care Proceedings

Cafcass (2020) reports that the national rate of care applications per 10,000 of the 0-17 population, which had increased from 8.0 in 2009/10 to a height of 12.3 in 2016/17, is now reducing. There were 10.8 care applications per 10,000 0-17 population in 2019/20. However, there is significant variation between individual local authorities, from the lowest rate of 4.3 to the highest rate of 47.4.

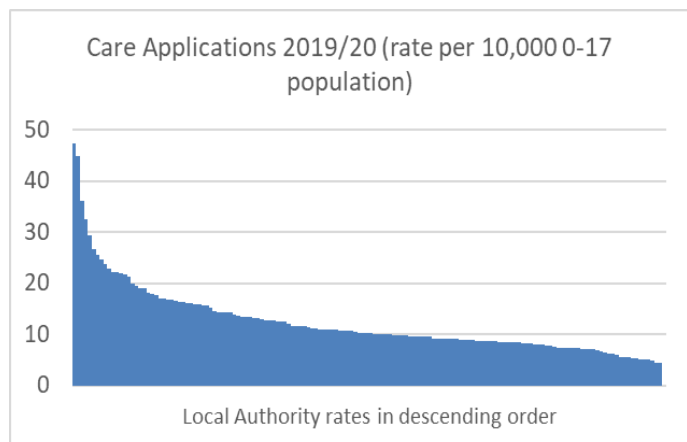


Figure 35: Care applications 2019/20 – rate per 10,000

92% of respondents state that they have experienced changes in Court decisions which have impacted on the plans for children and young people.

Q 12: What changes, if any, have you experienced in Court decisions?

(Number of LAs responding: 53)



Figure 36: Responses to qualitative question 12

The impacts of Court are listed below in order of frequency mentioned, identifying those which were present before March 2020, and those which have arisen as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some respondents highlighted the strong relationships they have with the Local Family Justice Board and are working together to resolve some of the issues.

- Continued reluctance on the part of the courts to separate children from their parents even when thresholds for abuse and neglect have been reached, and a feeling of risk aversion from the judiciary and Cafcass, resulting in outcomes contrary to the local authority's advice
- As in phase 6, respondents described an increase in children placed at home with parents on care orders. Respondents also noted that courts are granting care orders when a Supervision Order has been applied for by the local authority as the best approach to working with the family
- Delays in hearing applications made to discharge care orders in favour of special guardianship orders, as this is seen as a non-urgent matter by the courts
- Continued increase in court-directed placements in residential mother and baby units and increase in requests for additional expert assessments which causes delay and places a significant financial burden on the local authority
- Delays as a result of court timetabling and Judge availability in some parts of the country increases the amount of time that children spend in care before moving to their permanent home
- Whilst the judicial guidance on split hearings is now ten years old, and the most recent case law over six years old, these continue to be rare, and composite hearings favoured. This often means additional work for social workers, preparing contingency care plans, but also causes distress to families and children, when cases inevitably are adjourned for findings to be discussed, and timetables amended.

“We have experienced judges recently granting an SGO with a Care Order alongside. The impact of this is that these children are essentially still looked after and permanence has not been achieved. Use of placement with parents in the North West remains higher than average and we feel some of the final orders are unnecessary. The Care Order has no value and is a burden to both the family and the LA. Risk can be managed at a lower level and appropriate action taken if required. The Care Order in these cases adds little value and does not increase the safety net. The LA can still effectively safeguard without the Care Order”. - *North West LA*

Covid-19 period: April to September 2020

Cafcass reports a -1.7% decrease in new public law cases (-3.3% decrease in the number of children) between April and December 2020 (13,464 cases featuring 21,565 children) compared to the same nine months in the previous year. The number of cases open to Cafcass in December 2020 illustrates the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic measures on delays. There were a total of 42,256 cases open across England, of which 14,765 were public law, the remainder private law. This is an increase from the previous year (December 2019) of 34,287 and 12,806 respectively.

The courts have responded to the pandemic with significant changes in the way they function to ensure hearings can continue to be held. Remote hearings were introduced using video conferencing platforms and since the easing of the first national lockdown, hybrid hearings have been introduced whereby many professionals attend by video and only those necessary attend court in person subject to strict limits on numbers. This has been a success in the most part in that time has been saved for professionals in not attending at court plus hearings have run to schedule when commenced. This may not be the same experience however for parents who may struggle with access to technology and their remoteness. 'Nightingale courts' are being used on a temporary basis to ensure as many hearings as possible can continue to take place during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The detrimental impacts of these court pressures are:

- Reduction in timeliness for care proceedings and achieving permanence for children
- The experience of virtual hearings for parents who may struggle with technology or digital isolation
- Final Hearings have been delayed due to experts not being able to see families to complete evidence
- Delays may result in a late decision by parents to contest proceedings
- An increase in children remaining looked after and attendant pressures on placements due to the delay in the discharge of care or placement orders, granting of adoption orders, special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders
- Impact on the children and young people, carers and adoptive parents who want to move on as a family.

"Now that courts are operating hybrid hearings, hearings have started to be relisted, however, due to availability and limited capacity of court space, some of these final hearings are being relisted months ahead again causing further delay. Ourselves and our legal representatives, have maintained regular contact with the judiciary which has been positive, with cases that need prioritising in regard to impact of further delay being identified and shared with the courts." - South East LA

11 Children Looked After

11.1 National and policy context

Policy relating to children looked after and care leavers has been subject of more reviews and legislative change than other aspects of children’s social work, with further significant future changes heralded with the commencement of The Children’s Social Care Review in January 2021. Recommendations from previous reviews (e.g. Narey’s review of children’s residential care in 2016, and the Fostering Stocktake (Narey and Owers, 2016) have not been implemented. Numbers of children looked after continue to rise, suggesting that the factors and determinants which lead to children becoming looked after remain unresolved. The impact of historical legislation and case law such as The Southwark Judgment relating to accommodating 16 and 17 year olds continue. Changes to legislation and guidance are illustrated in the timeline in section 4 and on the ADCS website⁵.

Reasons for children starting to be looked after, age, and narrative from respondents relating to their strategies to ensure best practice relating to children looked after, is provided in section 14.

11.2 Number of children looked after

11.2.1 Children starting to be looked after

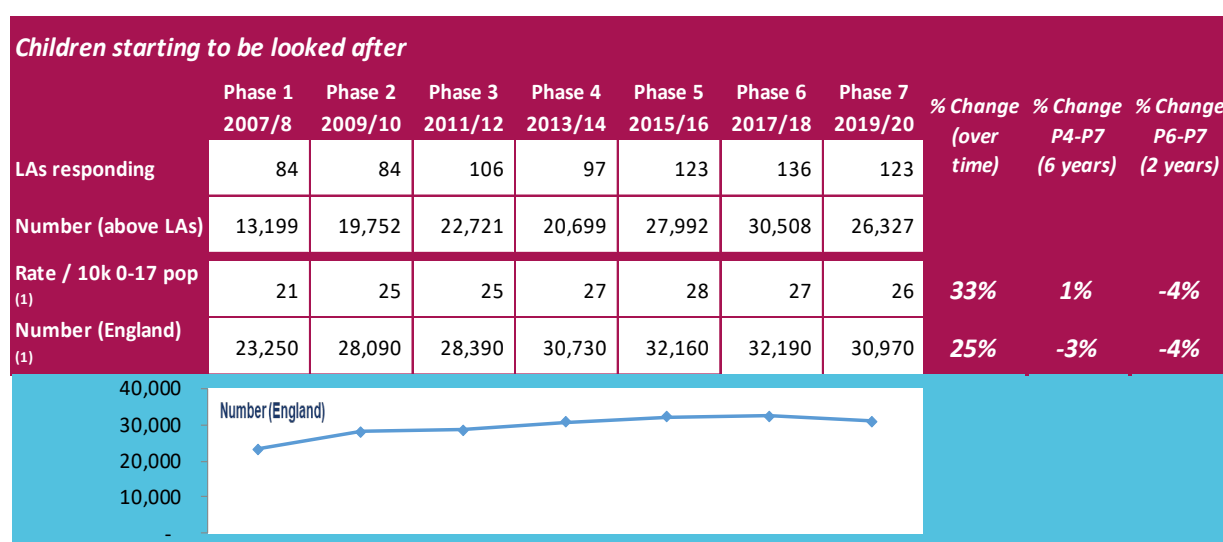


Figure 37: Children starting to be looked after summary. (Note 1) Source: DfE 2020

⁵ <https://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/timeline>

Fewer children are starting to be looked after each year. DfE (2020) report that there were 30,970 children starting to be looked after during 2019/20, a rate of 26 per 10,000 0-17 population, and a 4% reduction from two years ago.

Variation between authorities providing information for Safeguarding Pressures research is significant. In 2019/20, the highest rate of children starting to be looked after was 90 (North East LA) and the lowest was 12 (Yorkshire & Humber LA). There is also significant regional variation, from the North East (45.4) to London (19.5). 62% of respondents reported a decrease in the number of children starting to be looked after and 38% of authorities reported an increase in the number of children starting to be looked after.

11.2.2 Children looked after at 31st March

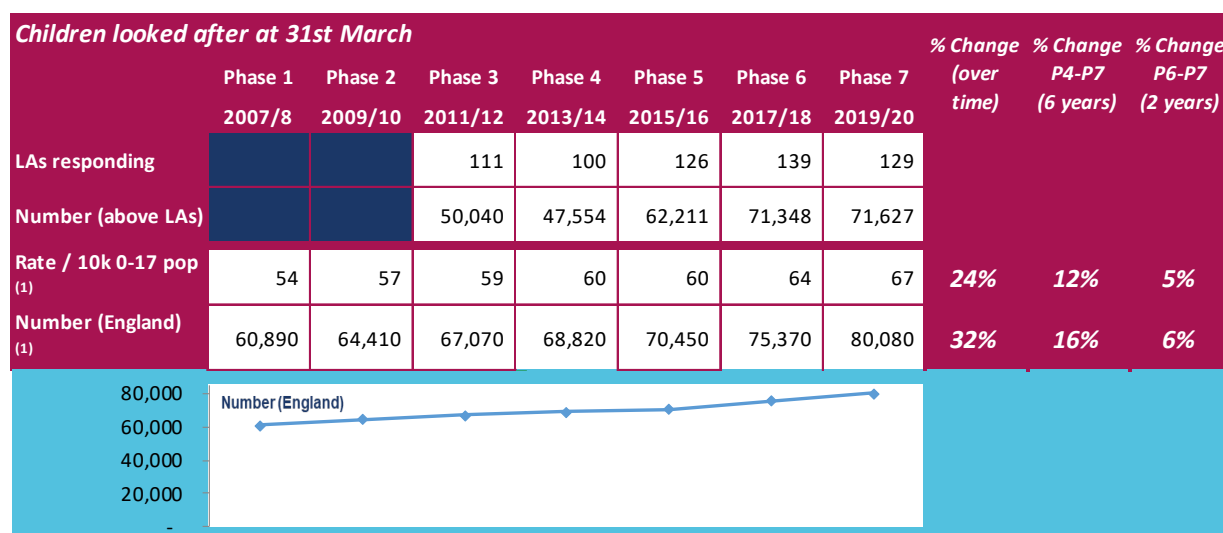


Figure 38: Children looked after at 31st March summary. (note 1) Source: DfE 2020

The number of children looked after at 31st March is increasing, despite a reduction in the number of children who are starting to be looked after. DfE (2020) reports that there were 80,080 children looked after at 31st March 2020, a rate of 67 per 10,000 0-17 population, and a 6% increase from two years ago.

The pattern of significant variation between local authorities continues, with the highest rate of 107 (NE LA) and lowest of 48.8 (London LA). Of the 117 authorities providing data in both phase 6 and phase 7, the number of children looked after at 31st March increased in 84 authorities (71%) and reduced in 33 authorities (28%). One local authority reported no change.

These figures do not include children who are looked after under a series of short break placements.

11.2.3 Children looked after under a series of short-term placements

The reduction in usage of legal status ‘accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks’ has continued following change in statutory guidance. These children are not included in reported children looked after numbers. 559 children were looked after under a series of short term breaks at 31st March 2020 in 45 local authorities, reflecting a continued reduction.

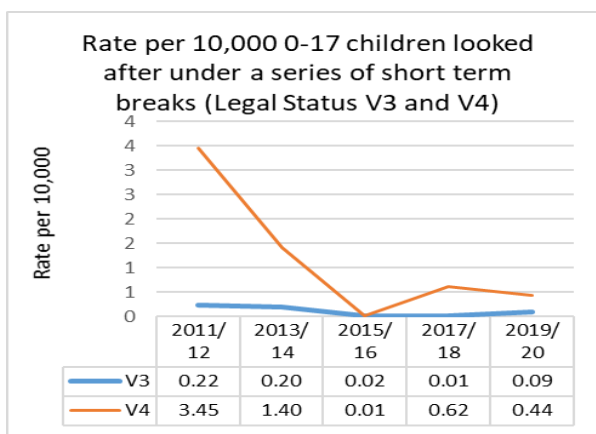


Figure 39: Children looked after under a series of short term breaks, either individual episodes are recorded (V3) or when agreements are recorded (V4)

11.2.4 Children ceasing to be looked after

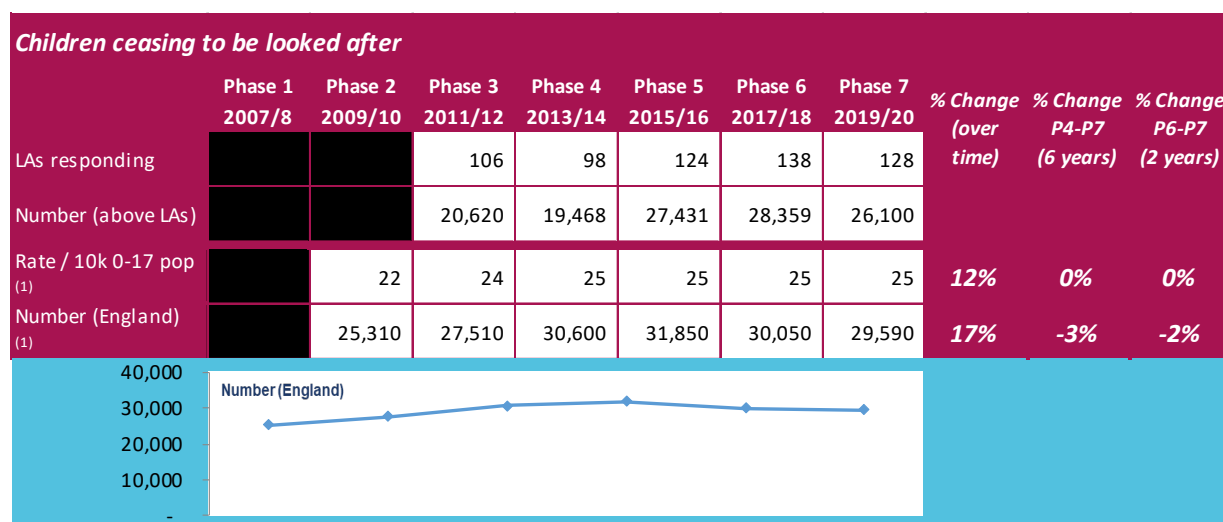
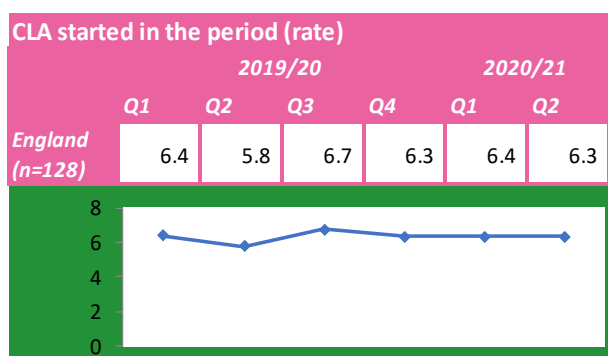
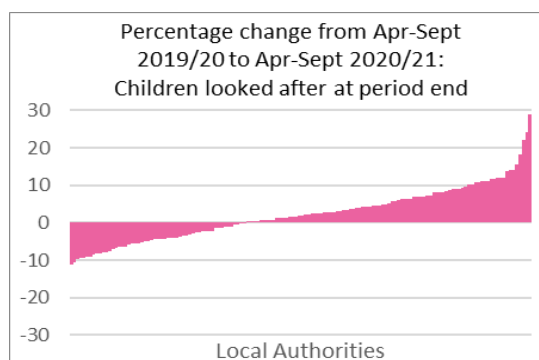
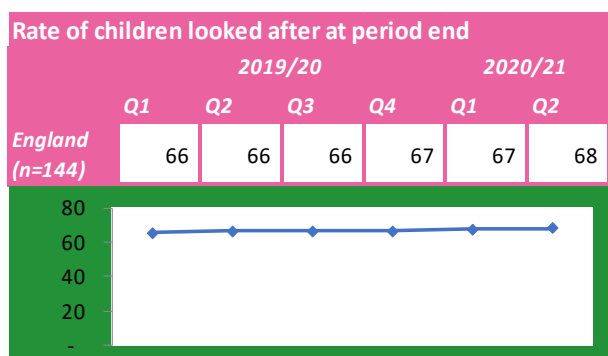


Figure 40: Children ceasing to be looked after summary. (Note 1) Source: DfE (2020)

29,590 children ceased to be looked after during 2019/20, a rate of 25 per 10,000 0-17 population and 2% fewer than two years ago (DfE 2020).

Safeguarding pressures research respondents report a highest rate of 60 (North East LA) and lowest of 11 (Yorkshire & Humber LA).

Covid-19 period: April to September 2020



Figures 41, 42, 43: Children looked after at period end and started to be looked after by quarter, and percentage change to September 2020. Source: regional datasets. Only includes LAs with data for all quarters

The number of children looked after at 30th September 2020 extrapolated to all England is 81,900. Regional quarterly data indicate that there were 2.6% more children looked after at the 30th September 2020 than at September 2019, largely as a result of fewer children ceasing to be looked after.

Respondents' experiences of change in the number of children looked after differed. Variation in numbers of children looked after between local authorities is increasing, although most respondents reported fewer children ceasing to be looked after.

11.3 Children looked after by legal status and type of plan

There have been some changes to the legal basis under which a child can become looked after. Placement Orders replaced Freeing Orders in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (S21) and from 2012 when the relevant sections of the LASPO Act came into effect, any child remanded by the youth court in criminal proceedings is looked after, whether the child is remanded to local authority accommodation or to youth detention accommodation.

59.2% of all children looked after at 31st March 2020 in 128 responding authorities are subjects of a Full Care Order, and the proportion has increased year-on-year. Fewer children are subjects of Placement Orders or accommodated voluntarily under Section 20. The reduction in the number of Placement Orders reflects the slowing down of adoption as a permanence outcome for children and young people.

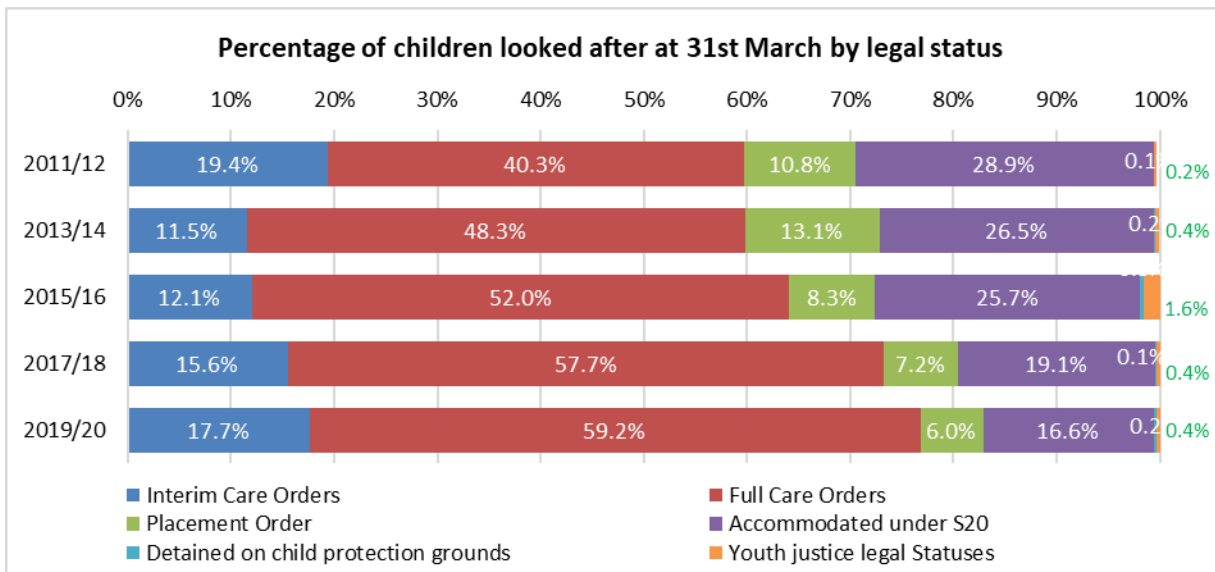


Figure 44: Percentage of children looked after by legal status as at 31st March

11.3.1 Type of plan

Analysis of the broad types of plan for children assists in understanding of those children looked after at that date, how many were expected to remain in long term foster care; return home to live with their birth parents; remain in long term residential placements; had a plan for adoption; supported or independent living; or, another planned outcome.

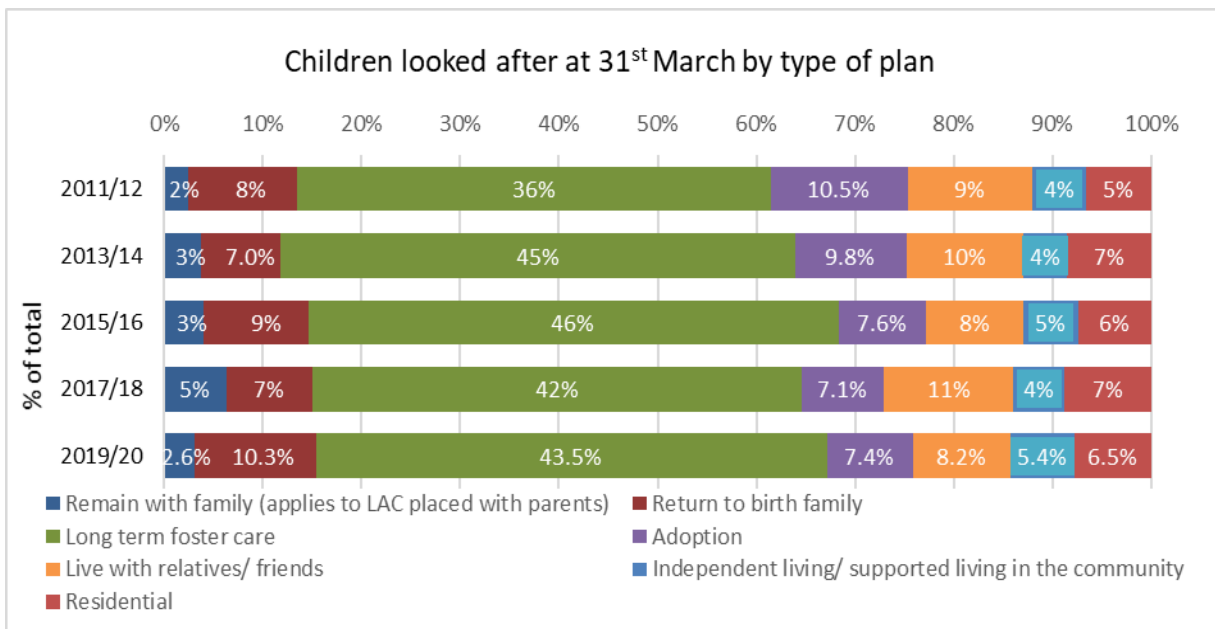


Figure 45: Type of plan (Source: SGP7 respondents)

In Phase 4 of this research (2015), only 27 authorities provided information about the type of plan for children looked after at the 31st March. In Phase 7, 74 authorities provided this information. The type of plan has changed slightly:

- There has been an increase in the number of children where the plan is ‘long term foster care’, from 36.1% to 43.5% of all children looked after at 31st March 2020
- Fewer children have a plan of adoption (6.5% in 2019/20 compared to 9.8% in 2013/14)
- 2.6% of children looked after at 31st March 2020 in responding authorities had a plan of remain with family, and 10.3% return home to birth family.

The sizeable cohort of children looked after who are in foster care placements illustrates that whilst for some children permanency whether through adoption, SGO or returning home is the goal, there is a considerable, and growing, number of children for whom the plan will be to remain looked after until their 18th birthday. The implications of this for future planning of services to meet needs and demand is significant and costly. That pressure will also become evident in care leaving services.

11.4 Placements

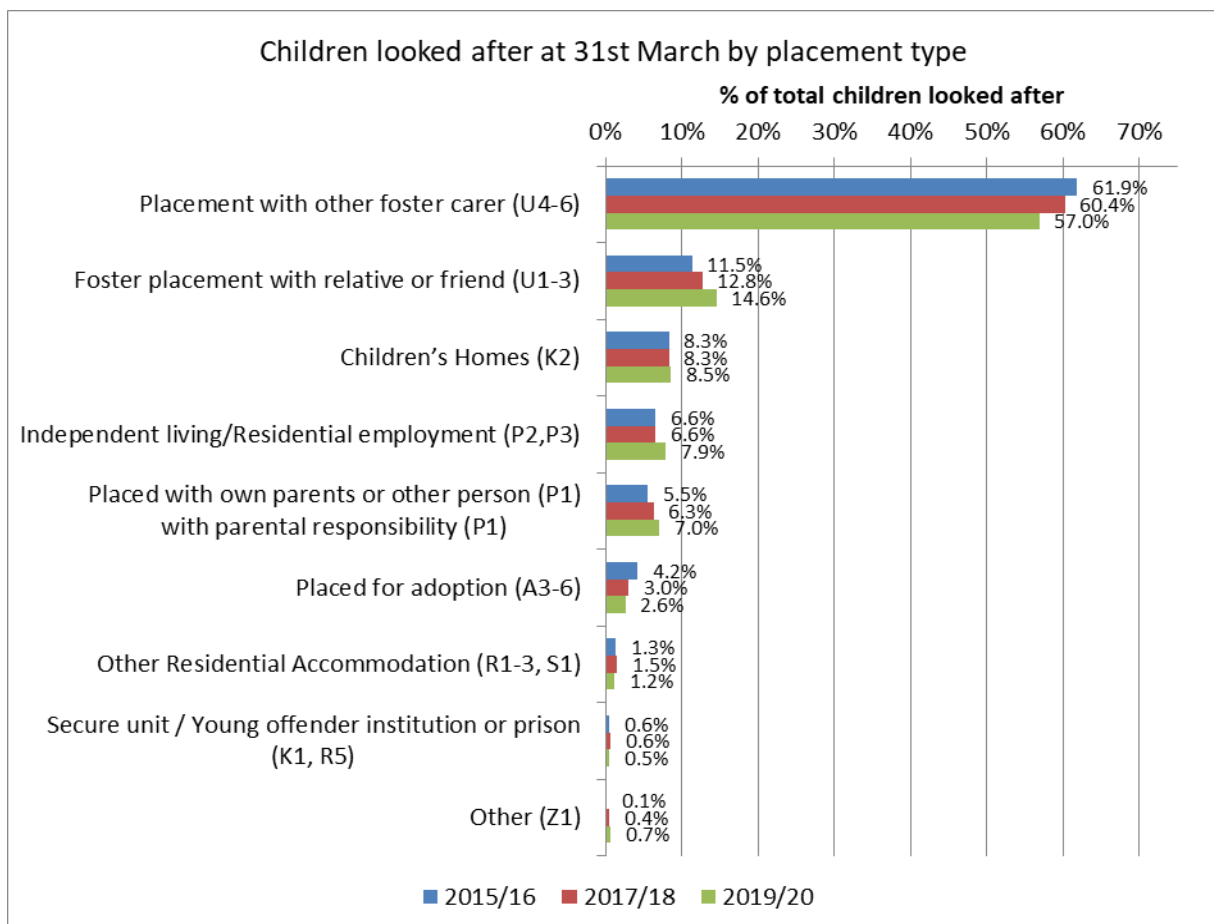


Figure 46: Percentage of children looked after at 31st March 2016 and 2020 by placement type. Source: SGP7 respondents. DfE data has not been used for analysis of placement type as not all data is available due to their rounding and suppression rules)

DfE (2020) reports that in England, 57,380 children at 31st March were in foster care placements, 11,570 of whom were placed with a relative or friend (kinship care). Foster care as a whole accounts for almost three quarters of all placements (72%), with little change over a decade despite the focus of reform on and investment in adoption.

The increase from 5.2% to 7% in the proportion of children placed at home with parents under a Full Care Order evidences the change in Court decision making noted in section 10 of this report.

3% of all children looked after were placed for adoption. This is fewer than two years ago (2,060 in 2019/20 compared to 2,510 in 2017/18) and significantly less than the 3,320 in 2014/15.

8.5% of children looked after are placed in residential settings, including children's homes or other residential care home, NHS/health trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care, residential schools, family centre or mother and baby unit. This is a similar proportion of all children looked after to previous years.

Numbers of children in Secure Children's Homes, YOI or Secure Training Centres are small and have reduced (430 children at 31st March 2020 compared to 460 two years ago). However, this does not reflect the in-year numbers of children requiring this type of placement. There continues to be an acute shortage of welfare secure placements, required for very vulnerable young people. In February 2020, there were 252 places in secure children's homes in England and Wales approved by the Secretary of State in addition to 107 approved places contracted to the Ministry of Justice (DfE, 2020). Some children are placed outside of these provisions in Scotland due to the shortage of secure welfare beds in England, facilitated by a change in legislation in 2017 which made it easier for children from England and Wales to be placed in secure care facilities in Scotland. Cascade (2020) reported that two in five young people referred to a secure children's home for their welfare have not subsequently been offered a place. This is likely to be a reason why children placed by the local authority on welfare grounds reduced from 97 in 2017/18 to 89. Additionally:

- Children detained or sentenced and placed by the YCS increased to 80 children, from 66 last year, representing 43% of children accommodated (up from 38% in 2019)
- Children placed by the local authority in a criminal justice context increased to 15 (up 6 children), representing 8% of the children accommodated (up from 5% in 2019).

There were 6,480 children in independent or semi-independent living arrangements in England. A higher proportion of all children looked after were in independent living in 2019/20 (7.9%) than two years ago (6.6%). Authorities with a higher proportion of children looked after placed in independent or semi-independent living are those with a high

proportion of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). In 17 local authorities, over 10% of children looked after were placed in independent living, 14 of which were London Boroughs accommodating high numbers of UASC.

Placement stability continues to vary between authorities but with little change overall. In 124 responding authorities, the average long-term stability (children looked after for 2.5 years who had been in the same placement for two years or more or placed for adoption) was 66%, and the average short term placement stability (three or more placements in the year) was 11%.

DfE reports that 56% of all foster care placements were outside the placing authority's boundary (DfE 2020). This will include some in-house local authority foster care placements in neighbouring authorities. Whilst it is usually desirable to place children as near to home as possible with few exceptions, this has resulted in a tangle of responsibilities between local authorities adding to the resources pressures. As one respondent stated: "we need to unwrap it all".

11.4.1 Foster care

Ofsted (2020) reports that at 31st March 2020:

- There were 83,930 approved fostering places available for children. Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) have seen a net increase in capacity of 330 additional households and 560 additional places. In contrast, LAs have seen a slight decrease in capacity of 230 households and 490 places
- The sector split of fostering households as at March 2020 remained similar to that in 2019 and 2018 (66% LA households and 34% IFA households)
- There has been a 3% increase in the number of filled fostering places, and a 13% decrease in the number of vacant places
- Of the 71,150 approved foster carers, 65% were over 50 years old and of these, 25% were over 60. The impact of Covid-19 on both the current cohort of older foster carers as well as on the potential recruitment and retention of new carers needs careful consideration
- There were 14,995 fostering households within the IFA sector. Around half of these (7,652) were registered with IFAs that are owned by the six largest IFA providers in England. These top six companies therefore account for 51% of all IFA households, and 18% of all fostering households nationally.

Foster placements with relative or friends (U1-U3) varies significantly across authorities. Less than 5% of children are placed with a relative or friend in five authorities, and more than 20% in 24 authorities.

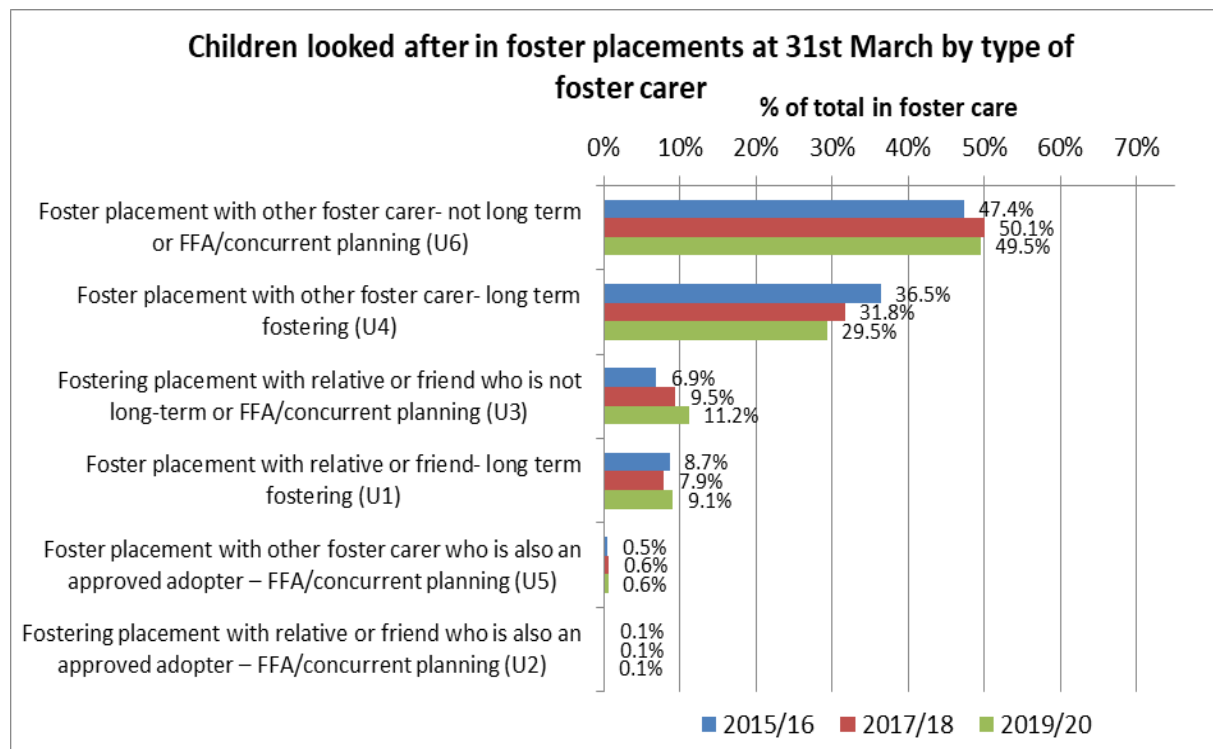


Figure 47 - Percentage of children in foster placements by type of placement.

Most local authorities continue proactive foster carer recruitment, assessment and training, often with limited budgets compared to the sizeable budgets of some IFAs. Respondents are developing and implementing new models, such as Mockingbird family model, and investing in packages of therapeutic, behavioural and peer support for foster carers.

“One of the biggest foster care agencies has a million pound marketing budget every year, how can we, as individual local authorities, possibly hope to compete.” - North West LA

11.4.2 Children looked after at 31st March by placement provider

DfE (2020) provides a breakdown of placement type by provider, evidencing that 37% of all foster care, and 83% of all residential care⁶ are provided by private or third sector providers. This equates to 21,130 and 10,110 placements respectively.

125 local authorities provided detailed data relating to 70,106 children and their placement provider at 31st March 2020. Fewer children were in a placement provided by their own local authority (49.3% compared to 52.7% at 31st March 2018). 36.2% overall were in private provision. This does not include children placed in another local authority's provision.

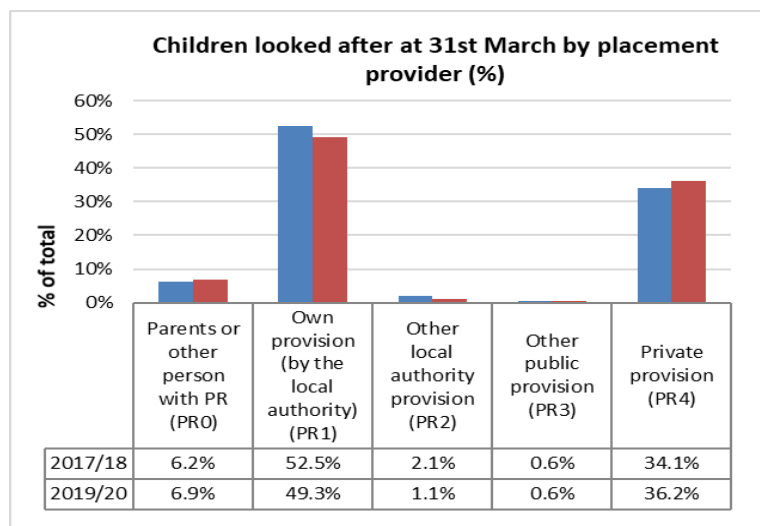


Figure 48 - Percentage of children looked after at 31st March by placement provider

11.4.3 Placement costs

Achieving quality and sufficiency of placements, and the right placement for the child was one of the top three challenges cited by almost every local authority taking part in this research. Many children are placed with families, remain at home or are placed for adoption and do well, and some placement providers were lauded for their approaches during the Covid-19 pandemic. But for a growing number of children looked after, it is not possible to find an appropriate placement to meet their needs at a realistic cost with private providers dominating the market. Respondents evidence a deterioration in placement availability and increasing costs for private provision, including independent fostering agency and residential placements over the past two years, and more so since March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. £5,000 - £7,000 a week for a placement is becoming more common as demand increases and availability reduces.

⁶Secure units, children's homes, semi-independent living arrangements, residential schools, other residential settings that are not other public provision (e.g. by CCG)

Current examples from respondents are provided below:

£75,000 a month for an 11 year old child with additional health needs child. (SE LA)	£7,900 a week for a residential placement for a young person, at a distance from their home. (NW LA)	Covid related additional placement costs have been tracked and amount to an estimated cost of £965k for the financial year. (Y&H LA)
<p>Example of average cost per week for placements (NE LA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £412 in-house foster care • £770 independent foster care • £3,049 residential • £285 independent living 	“I have never had to authorise a £1m+ a year placement until September this year, for a child who required mental health support.” (SW LA)	£25,000-£50,000 quoted a week for a secure ‘wing’ for one young person with a DoLs adjustment and Osman warning, subject of a Secure Order and Care Order, and who was a potential risk to others. (WM LA)
“We have needed to spend a significant sum preparing 3 vacant buildings as contingency accommodation to manage emergencies caused by COVID. This has pushed a small number of children into residential which creates additional costs.” (NW LA)	“We have seen a decline in the numbers of children we are able to place internally from 80% in Q3 2019/20 to 74% of Q1 2020/21, and a marked increase in the numbers of residential beds we have commissioned out of borough.” (NW LA)	Finding foster placements for 14 to 16 year-old young people who may have challenging behaviours and keep running away “can result in the only viable placement available being an residential placement, when they don't really need it, but we don't really have anything else.” (SE LA)

Reviews such as the Fostering Stocktake (Narey and Owers 2018), residential care (Narey, 2016) and private provision in children’s social care (The Children’s Commissioner, 2020) all provide evidence of costs in the system. The Children’s Commissioner (2020) stated that *“the best available estimates suggest that large private providers make a profit margin of around 17% on the fees they receive from local authorities. Across the sample of large providers considered in this analysis, it works out to around £240 million profit in total. However 17% is an average figure across several different companies and it can quickly become out of date, with new accounts regularly being filed.”* The recommendations provide a framework for addressing some of these issues and urgent national action is required to address cost and profiteering. The ‘market’ is clearly dysfunctional.

Covid-19 period: April to September 2020

Authorities have had different experiences during this period, but 98% agree that lockdown has had some impact on availability of placements and services. Many out of authority residential settings were not accepting any, or fewer placements during lockdown to comply with restrictions. Together with a reduction in the availability of secure placements and independent fostering placements during lockdown, this puts pressure on the authority’s ability to place some children and young people, particularly those with complex needs and mental health issues.

Respondents reported that a number of in-house foster carers were shielding or self-isolating and therefore unwilling to take new children into their homes and independent providers were even more selective in the young people there were prepared to offer places to.

Examples from individual respondents are provided below:

- One child age 7 being placed in a residential placement due to a lack of fostering placements (in-house and externally)
- At least four children during this period who have been assessed as needing a tier 4 placement and none have been available
- Forecast £995k of additional costs of external placements for children in care due to the Covid-19 pandemic by the end of the year
- Some respondents opened new children's homes setting to accommodate children in care short-term or for short breaks during the pandemic period due to lack of available placements.

In terms of mitigations, respondents reported:

- Implementing the Mockingbird model for foster care
- Providing wrap around, behaviour and therapeutic support for their own foster placements.

Around half of authorities reported a positive impact in terms of placement stability. Feedback from some children, families and carers indicates that relationships had in fact improved due to less pressure on families to maintain routines.

11.5 Adoption and permanence

The proportion of children leaving care through adoption reduced slightly from 12.8% of all children leaving care in 2017/18 to 12.0% in 2019/20. A greater proportion (12.7%) found permanence through special guardianship orders.

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) quarterly adoption data (ASGLB, 2020) show that for the period to 30th September 2020, the number of children moving into and through the adoption process is declining. There continues to be a decrease in the number of children subject of a Placement Order who are waiting for adoption, but those with an order who wait more than 18 months to be matched continues to increase. As at 30th September 2020, there was a total of 2,030 children with a Placement Order waiting to be matched, a decrease of 24% when compared to the same period the previous year.

In 2017/18, responding authorities reported a significant increase in the number of children whose decision for adoption had been reversed because the court did not make a Placement Order, representing 33.9% of all reversal decisions. In 2019/20, this trend has changed and of the 787 children in 119 responding authorities who had a decision changed away from adoption this proportion is now markedly smaller (18%). More reversals are now due to ‘any other reason’ (32%) and ‘child’s needs changed’ (28%).

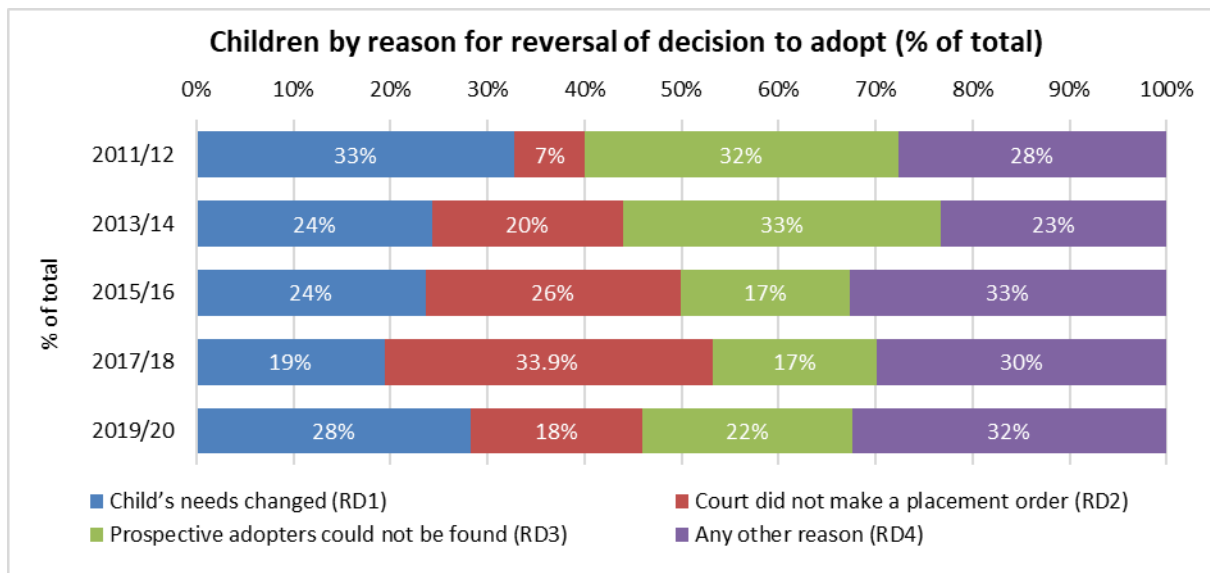


Figure 49: Reversals of adoption decisions by reason - % of the total

2,000 special guardianship orders were granted in the first six months of 2020/21 (ASGLB, 2020). Of note, 52% of these were for children aged 5 years and under, and 55% overall were placed with grandparents. An estimated 40,350 children achieved permanence via either a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), Child Arrangement Order (CAO) or Residence Order (RO) in England compared to 36,000 two years ago. (DfE, 2020).

12 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

A special thematic report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children was published by ADfS in November 2016 as part of Safeguarding Pressures Phase 5 (ADfS, 2016b). The thematic report concluded that between 2014 and 2016, the number of UASC in England had doubled, but with significant variation across the country, and an increase anticipated in the majority of authorities. ADfS estimated that the level of under-funding was in the region of £34,000 per UASC per year. The Local Government Association evidenced that in 2015/16, local authorities spent £113m on support for UASC (£48million over budget). In 2018, Safeguarding Pressures research Phase 6 report brought key findings about the number of UASC up to date and a greater focus is again provided in Phase 7.

12.1 National context and policy

Unaccompanied and separated children are among the most vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation, both in transit and at their destination. The UK's exit from the European Union in January 2021 removed one of the legal routes of entry into the UK for unaccompanied minors to be reunited with family already in the UK (the Dublin Treatises). Local authorities anticipate this will increase the number of young people arriving clandestinely.

The voluntary National UASC Transfer Scheme (NTS) came into effect in 2016, predicated upon each local authority accepting UASC up to 0.07% of its child population to ensure more equitable distribution across the country. However, a relatively small number of local authorities (primarily the 'port' authorities) continue to support a disproportionately large number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, with some local authorities unwilling to participate in the voluntary transfer scheme. A recent consultation has been undertaken by the Home Office and the DfE as to whether the NTS should be mandated. The government has yet to respond.

In November 2017, the UK Government published its Safeguarding Strategy for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children (Home Office & DfE 2017). Forming the government's response to the increased numbers of UASC arriving between 2015-16, (as a result of the clearance of the migrant camps in Calais). This strategy set out the future actions the government would take to address the specific challenges they face through:

- Improving the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking children by increasing placement capacity, improving the skills and confidence of foster carers to care for them, and reviewing funding available to local authorities
- Supporting professionals caring and working with these children through revised guidance, information and resources
- Improving the information and advice available to children and families who are reunited through the Dublin III Regulations
- Preventing children from going missing including improvements to initial information collection and information sharing between agencies
- Improving the processes for transfer of children from Europe and supporting local authorities to assess and provide support for both them and their families
- Strengthening transparency and accountability through publication of data and reports to the four UK Children's Commissioners and Parliament.

Respondents provided evidence that these challenges remain, there having been no progress on the above list of promised government actions.

12.2 Number and characteristics of UASC

This section provides an overview of the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, including where they have come from, how they got here and their characteristics. This information is important to understand the ‘unofficial’ channels which children both arrive and depart from so that they can be better identified, safeguarded and their specific needs met. Three sources provide information:

- Nationally published data report UASC at 31st March each year (DfE, 2020)
- Nationally published Home Office immigration statistics to September 2020 (Home Office, 2020a)
- Data to September 2020 collected as part of ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase 7 research.

12.2.1 Number of UASC

DfE (2020) states that there were 5,000 UASC in England at 31st March, however DfE does not report children starting or ceasing to be looked after who are UASC. This information is collected for this research, illustrating the greater volume of children that are supported in-year.

In the 123 responding authorities, 4,260 UASC were looked after at 31st March, 3,238 UASC started to be looked after in 2019/20, and 7,412 were supported at any time during the year. Rates per 10,000 0-17 population are shown in the adjacent figure.

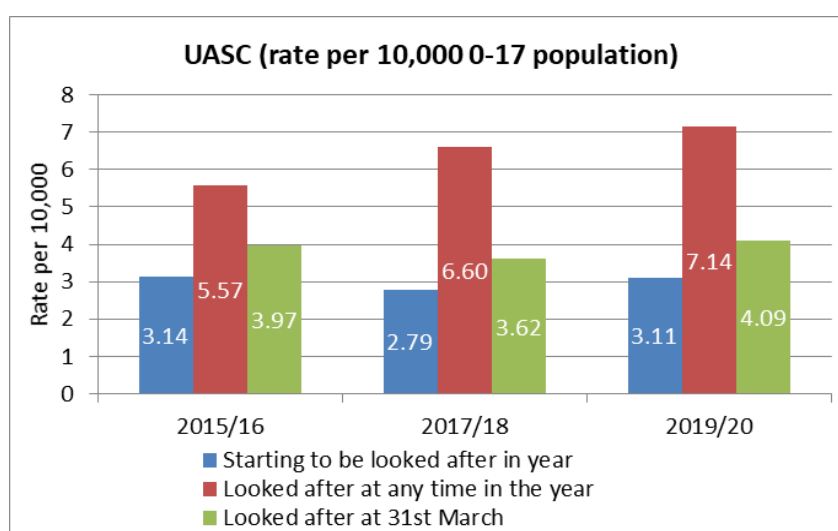


Figure 50: UASC starting, looked after at any time and looked after at 31st March in responding authorities

There is significantly greater variation across the country than previously, with significantly fewer UASC in the North and the greatest number in London and the South East. Within these regional averages, the number in each local authority also varies considerably. For example, 245 of the 420 UASC in the North West are in Liverpool and Manchester. 426 of the 1,040 UASC in the South East are in Kent.

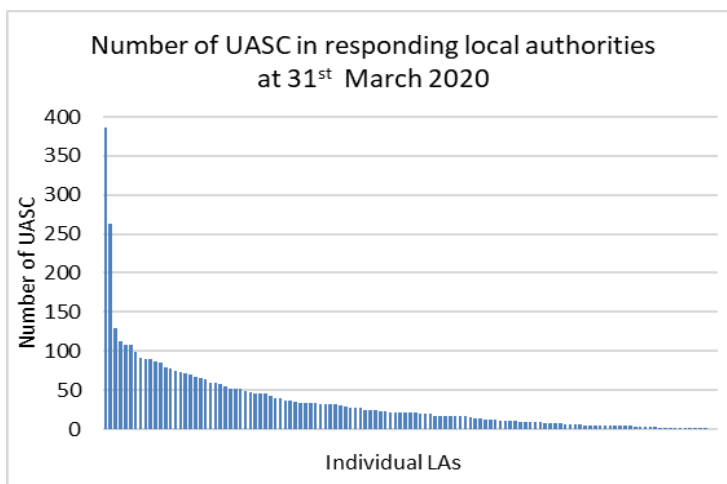


Figure 51: Number of UASC in responding authorities at 31st March by region. Source: SGP7 data

Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children looked after at 31 st March					
	2011/12	2013/14	2015/16	2017/18	2019/20
North East	20	20	20	50	50
North West	90	60	120	290	420
Yorkshire & the Humber	90	50	130	260	250
West Midlands	270	130	380	500	420
East Midlands	160	140	280	280	250
East of England	190	190	460	500	580
London	920	980	1490	1520	1770
South East	430	450	1360	860	1040
South West	60	40	100	300	240
England	2230	2060	4340	4560	5000

Figure 52 : Number of UASC at 31st March by region. Source: DfE (2020)

12.2.2 Age and gender breakdown

Most asylum seeking or refugee children that are accompanied by their family are aged 0-4, and very few have been recorded above the age of 12. Conversely, 86% of unaccompanied children are aged 16 or over and 90% are male.

The current policy, where Home Office staff make an initial age assessment if physical appearance and demeanour “very strongly suggests that an individual is significantly over 25 years of age”, is problematic. Respondents report an ongoing challenge to ascertain robust age assessments of individuals presenting as UASC. Central to this dilemma is the responsibility of local authorities to those unaccompanied children who have a right to care and support, set against the safeguarding risks of unwittingly placing adults alongside vulnerable children. An example of this is given in one authority where a young person had

sadly died and whilst the age assessment had suggested the young person was 16, within a day of his death, the local authority was notified of his actual age as 22 years old.

According to the Refugee Council (2020), the Home Office figures show that 798 age disputes were raised in 2019, compared to 875 the previous year. 304 of these disputes resolved that the age of the claimant was over 18; while 494 established an age of less than 18.

Respondents urge the need for a better age assessment process and shared information at point of entry. The resources and legal processes where age is contested can be prohibitively expensive for local authorities, to such an extent that local authorities are disincentivised to take up every challenge and are consequently placed in a position of managing the safeguarding risk of placing a child whose age could be disputed. These difficulties in relation to age assessment incentivise young people to lie about their age upon arrival in the UK.

“Increasing presentations and higher age assessment disputes. Slow resolution and redress in the upper tribunal process- if we contest a judicial review it costs circa £60k if we win it costs £60k if we lose it costs £60k plus small damages. Incentive in system is to accept ages as this is much cheaper but this is not good if an older young people is placed with children/school etc. The legal resolutions need real action where the ages are obviously high.” - *East Midlands LA*

12.2.3 Country of origin and entry points of UASC to England

There have been changes to where children originate from in responding authorities.

Comparative data between 2015/16 and 2019/20 shows an increase in the absolute number of UASC from Sudan (479%), Vietnam (127%), Iraq (93%), Iran (85.61%) and Ethiopia (55%).

Noticeably, there has been a reduction in the number of UASC from Syria (-53%) and Albania (-26%). The diversity of nationalities remains a significant challenge in delivering ‘child

centred’ support that is sensitive and inclusive to the specificity of identity and nationality. In 118 respondents in September 2020, there were 63 different nationalities recorded amongst the UASC cohort; 291 UASC recorded as having their nationalities not known to the local authority, and a further 59 recorded as ‘other’ or categories of ethnicity as broad as African/South Asian/Arab.

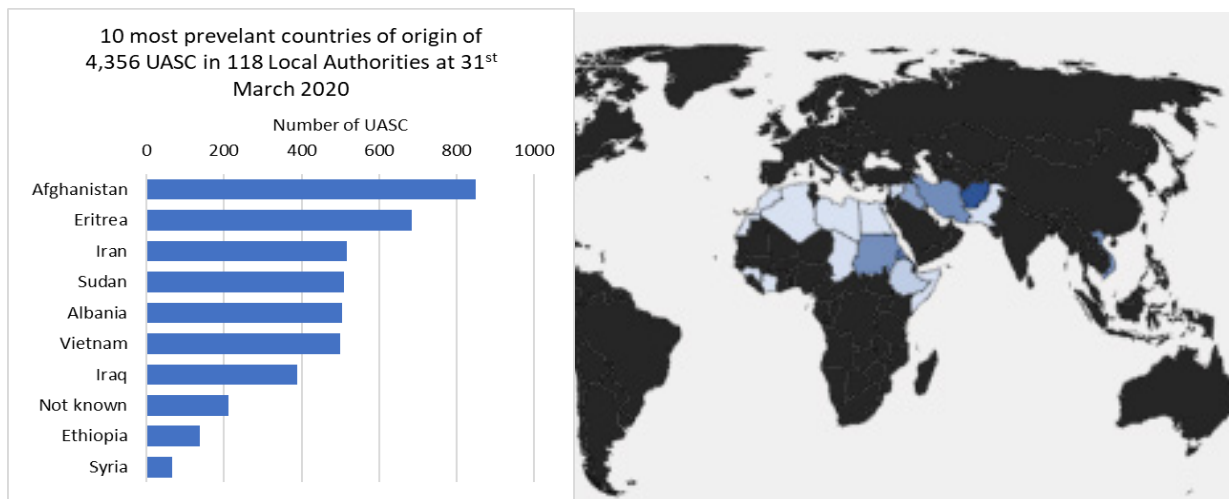


Figure 53. Table and chart of the most prevalent country of origin for UASC at 31st March 2020

Unaccompanied and separated children arrive in the UK by various means. Local authorities report that more young people are presenting through local ports and motorway service stations than have been transferred through the voluntary National Transfer Scheme, although half of local authorities responding state that UASC arrive through both routes.

Some authorities have seen numbers of UASC decrease, mostly in the North of England. Conversely, the surge of spontaneous arrivals to the south coast following the lifting of the first Pan-European lockdown saw the number of UASC starting to be looked after in Kent in the first six months of this year (352) already in line with the total number of UASC cared for by Kent County Council across the whole of last year (366). The increase in some areas in the South resulted in Kent County Council reluctantly taking the unprecedented step in August 2020 of refusing to collect arrivals from the port of Dover because the local authority could not safely fulfil its statutory duty of care towards these minors. A similar situation occurred in Portsmouth in November 2020. This emergency humanitarian situation resulted in the majority of local authorities across the country pledging placements for new arrivals. There have been approximately 200 UASC transferred directly from ports to other local authorities as a result of local authority placement pledges.

Since the NTS began in 2016 and up to the end of June 2020, it had transferred over 1,000 children. Some respondents provided their views that the NTS was disorganised and unable to distribute unaccompanied children in a fair and equitable manner across regions. This corresponds with the UNHCR (2019) report, stating a referral through the NTS can be highly disruptive to a child's reception and early integration experience. Several authorities suggested the need to consider a mandatory scheme that replicated successful regional schemes, e.g. the pan-London rota scheme proportional to council resources and capacity.

12.2.4 Meeting the needs of UASC

Unaccompanied and separated children are required to access both the children's social care system and the immigration and asylum system. These two systems have distinct objectives, timeframes and funding arrangements. The immigration, asylum and care planning systems are not aligned.

National Asylum Intake Units (NAIU) across the UK are focal points for processing new arrivals. These units place concomitant pressures in the local authority areas where these units are situated. Laverstoke Court in Derby is an example of this. Since opening in 2018, there has been a significant increase in the pressures placed on services in Derby City Council. Derby City Council evidenced a 350% increase in the number of looked after UASC at any time between 2016/17 and 2019/20 in addition to experiencing "around a 900% increase in young people requesting services of Derby City Council claiming to be children". The breadth and complexity of need for wrap around care attached to the NAIUs includes:

- Support to access education, including English classes
- Support to access health services – emotional and physical
- Support to develop and promote their identity
- Social and self-care skills
- Access to places of worship
- Financial Support
- Asylum and Immigration support
- Advocacy and migrant support
- Linking into community groups.

Practitioners are becoming more aware of the extent and severity of mental health issues that accompany the needs to house, educate and care for these young people. Similarly, the realities of trying to provide care to UASC are exacerbated by the delays in immigration decision making processes in the Home Office which impact upon the timeliness and continuity of care.

"Mental health difficulties have been exacerbated for many this year because of delays in Home Office decision making about leave to remain which has a significant impact because of their fear of having to return home to dangerous situations. They are also very fearful about what is happening to family members." *North West Region LA*

In terms of placement needs, at 30th September in respondent authorities nearly half of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (49%) were in foster care placements; 29% in residential accommodation and 21% in independent living.

12.2.5 Resources and funding

Home Office funding for UASC continues to be insufficient to meet the costs of caring for and supporting UASC, despite the welcome increase in funding in 2020 from the Home Office. Current rates are £114 for each UASC looked after in those authorities below the NTS 0.07% threshold and £143 for those above, to be reviewed at the end of 2020/21 (Home Office, 2020). Care leaver rates increased to £240 per week in June 2020.

Councils spent almost £176 million on supporting UASC in 2018/19 – a rise of 85% on the £95 million spent in 2013/14. Even the welcome uplifted grant funding provided by the Home Office in 2020 covers at best 50% of the costs of caring for an unaccompanied child. In 2016/17, East Midlands Councils identified that the average cost to a council in the region of supporting a former UASC care leaver is £16,602 per year, compared to the then £10,485 received in government funding. (East Midlands Councils, 2020). As noted above, since these reports were published, the government has provided a welcome funding increase which has helped to reduce the funding gap between what councils pay to support children and care leavers and what they receive from the Government. The current rate of funding however remains inadequate.

Authorities provided examples of their calculations of costs based on assumptions of age and the needs of the current and anticipated increase in UASC:

- One local authority evidenced an UASC placed in IFA placement cost an average of £837 per week. This is in comparison to the Home Office funding of £798 per week, hence a shortfall of £39 per week/ £2,028 per annum per UASC
- Research undertaken by a Regional Strategic Migration Partnership found an average shortfall of £4,112 per care leaver per year
- A shortfall in 2019/20 of £2.8m was reported by one local authority
- One local authority estimated that the average shortfall in funding for a fostering placement is circa £18,000 per annum rising to over £200,000 per annum where in those exceptional circumstances a residential placement is required.

“Many of our UASC care leavers require and are entitled to care leaving support up to 25 years. The current Home Office funding is only available for young people aged 21 or over if they are in education or training whereas the same condition does not apply to LAs’ duty to support care leavers up to 25. Home Office funding ceases when all appeal rights are exhausted (A.R.E) and there are delays in the Home Office not taking any steps to remove them from the UK. This means that the living and accommodation costs for care leavers fall on the LA.” – *West Midlands LA*

13 Care Leavers

13.1 National context and policy

The Children & Families Act 2014 introduced ‘Staying Put’ duties on local authorities to provide care leavers with the opportunity to remain with their former foster carer after they reach the age of 18. Section 3 of the Children & Social Work Act 2017, which came into effect on 1st April 2018, placed new duties on local authorities to offer the support of a Personal Advisor to all care leavers to the age of 25 instead of age 21. Whilst the responsibilities are less for those aged over 21 in terms of provision of education, employment or training and accommodation, the additional cohort of young people means increased capacity required in appropriate placements and in local authority care leaver teams. Despite raising the age for care leaver support, DfE does not collect or report on care leavers aged 22-25. This makes a national understanding of the prevalence, services, and outcomes for this growing group of young adults both challenging and underreports the demand on services and budgets within the local authority in national data.

13.2 Number of care leavers

There were 42,960 care leavers aged 17 to 21 in England on 31st March 2020 (DfE 2020), an increase of 9% in the last two years.

We estimate from data provided by 107 research respondents, that there are an additional 6,145 care leavers age 22 to 25 who fall within the new duties.

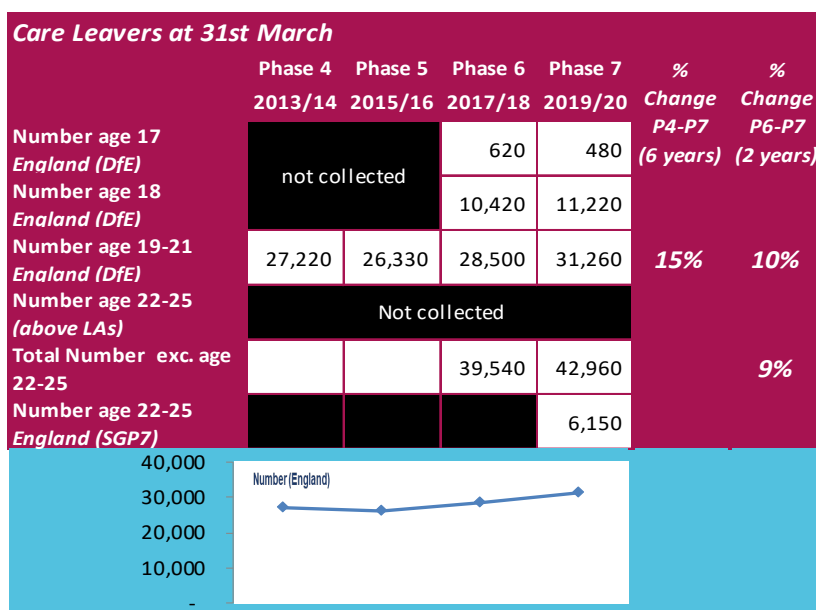


Figure 54: Care leavers - summary

The age profile of care leavers and changes in the past two years are illustrated here. There are variations between authorities and in regions in the rate of care leavers. Reasons for this may be due to the proportion of UASC, and the number of children starting to be looked after in the older age group.

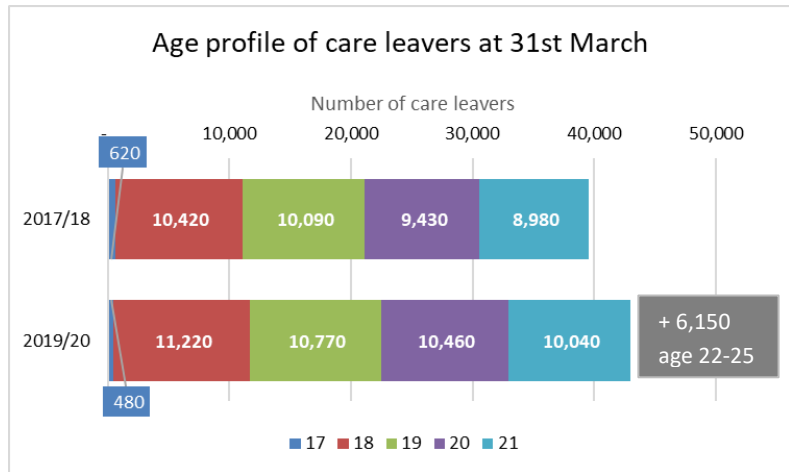


Figure 55 - care leavers by age. Source: age 17-21 DfE (2020). Age 22-25 SGP7 respondents extrapolated to all England

13.2.1 UASC care leavers

Analysis of the 108 returns for Phase 7 of this research indicates a significant increase in the number of care leavers who are former UASC with an estimated 6,901 being cared for in 2019/20. This is estimated to be a 60% increase compared to 2017/18, with every region experiencing increased numbers of former UASC care leavers. Several local authorities highlight the impact of uncertain immigration status on the support provided to UASC care leavers. Delays in immigration decision making processes have substantial implications for young people.

Based on the number of former UASC in leaving care services in the East Midlands in December 2020 (n=700), there is an annual shortfall to the region's local authorities of £2.9 million (East Midlands Councils, 2020).

13.3 Meeting the needs of care leavers

Ofsted (2020) reports that the proportion of children staying put with their foster family after turning 18 was 1,385 compared to 1,570 two years ago. Care leavers staying put account for 8% of all unavailable foster care placements. Staying put arrangements are having a positive impact for care leavers. However, an unintended consequence of the legislation has been a reduction in the availability of foster care placements adding to the placement pressures. Whilst raising the age of support to 25 is a positive outcome for care leavers, research respondents confirm that the level of new burdens funding from government is insufficient. Whilst the financial burdens of the new duties were cited as an issue for them, respondents stated how they are tackling the new duties to ensure services are in place for the extended age range by revising their care leaver strategies, working with care leavers on the local offer, housing arrangements and increasing the number of PAs.

Covid-19 period: April to September 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic and responses to it have hit young people, including care leavers, hard. Availability of accommodation for young people to move on to has decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic, partly due to lack of movement in the housing market. For some young people, frustration with restrictions is placing increasing pressure on carers and placements as well as parents, including their ability to support young people's emotional wellbeing.

The recent loss of training and employment opportunities, partly due to the closure of the retail and hospitality sectors during the past year, has had a significant impact on employment, training and/or education for care leavers. For those young people not in work or education, a decline in mental wellbeing was cited as becoming increasingly apparent in some care leavers. Care leavers are accessing extra support from children's services due to other services being less available i.e. counselling services, drug and alcohol support, training and college provision.

14 A Whole System View: Correlations and Factors Across Early Help and Social Care

An important facet of ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research is to correlate and triangulate a range of evidence to provide a system-wide view. This section aims to do that, providing evidence across:

- Needs and presenting factors
- Ages of children receiving social care services
- Timeliness and duration of a range of activity such as assessments, child protection plans and being looked after
- Revolving door
- Outcomes of early help and social care activity
- Other correlations.

14.1 Needs and presenting factors

Information about why children and families require early help or social care services is reported together here, to provide an insight into provision of support at different levels of need. These are categorised into two types of factors:

- Societal Determinants: changes to the underlying needs faced by the local community and parents. This includes population changes, housing difficulties, in-secure work and poverty
- System Factors: the way that the system of services responds to families requiring help.

Respondents reported more acute presentation of some factors during the Covid-19 pandemic, and where appropriate, changes and presenting needs pre- and post-Covid are reported together by factor.

Societal factors

14.1.1 Population

There were 12 million children aged 0-17 in England in 2019, 156,611 (+1.3%) more than two years ago (ONS, 2020). Growth in population accounts for some, but not all, of the increase in demand for services. Both the historical and projected increases in population vary across the country. In the 12 years since Safeguarding Pressures research commenced, London's child population has increased by 17.4% (327,812), and the North East has reduced by -0.6% (-3,370).

	MYE 2007	MYE 2013	MYE 2017	MYE 2019	% change 2 yrs	% change 12 yrs
North East	535,427	525,046	527,411	532,057	0.9%	-0.6%
North West	1,517,333	1,509,521	1,543,276	1,563,460	1.3%	3.1%
Yorks & The Humber	1,121,576	1,137,668	1,158,481	1,169,941	1.0%	4.3%
West Midlands	1,227,887	1,250,946	1,282,904	1,299,803	1.3%	5.7%
East Midlands	944,555	960,989	988,743	1,002,649	1.4%	6.0%
East of England	1,233,788	1,275,888	1,324,441	1,346,457	1.7%	8.8%
London	1,704,615	1,886,785	2,001,359	2,032,427	1.6%	17.4%
South East	1,814,902	1,890,174	1,943,865	1,969,297	1.3%	8.2%
South West	1,052,701	1,069,434	1,096,477	1,107,477	1.0%	5.1%
England	11,152,784	11,506,451	11,866,957	12,023,568	1.3%	7.6%

Figure 56: Population by region. MYE = mid year estimate which are produced a year in arrears (e.g. 2019 MYEs published in 2020). Source: ONS mid year population estimates

The 0-17 age population, based on 2018 mid-year estimates, is projected to increase to 12.2m in 2025, again with regional variations (ONS, 2019). This is lower than the Office for National Statistics (ONS) previous projection of 12.5m based on the 2016 mid-year estimates (ONS, 2016). Although the population increase in some areas, London for example, is stabilising to some extent, any future population projections and population changes, as a result of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, are unknown.

“Our child population has grown annually by circa 2% since 2015. The annual school census completed in January 2020 identified 87,745 pupils attending schools in our area compared to 75,851 pupils in January 2015 – this snapshot shows growth of 11,894 pupils across the mainstream primary and secondary phases within 5 years.” – *North West LA*

Respondents told us that population and demographic changes are having a more widespread impact on the demand for services, particularly school places and SEND provision. Over three quarters of respondents had seen an increase in the number of children aged 0 to 17 in the local area and accredited the increase to a range of factors. An increase in births; net inward migration; increase in refugee and asylum seekers; and, growth in new-build housing. For some local authorities surrounding urban areas with high cost and limited housing, such as London, the impact of families moving into, or being placed in their authority has increased the size of the most vulnerable population who are more likely to require support services.

14.1.2 Poverty

The Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income-deprived families (MHCLG, 2020). The link between deprivation, the need for family support, and statutory children’s social care interventions is well established (Bywaters *et al*, 2016) and forms an important part of the Safeguarding Pressures research evidence base. This is borne out by the heatmap showing correlation of rates per 10,000 0-17 of key activity on page 89. It illustrates that the greatest increases in child population no longer tend to be in areas of the highest deprivation although there is a visible link between deprivation and social care activity, as Bywaters *et al* state.

In 2018/19, there were 2.7 million children and young people living in relative low income and the proportion of children living in low income families in individual authorities varies, from 6% to 38% living in relative poverty. Seven out of the ten authorities with the highest proportion of children living on low income families are in the North West (DWP, 2020). The Social Mobility Commission (2020) reports a different figure of 4.2 million children living in poverty, 600,000 more than in 2011/12 with rates projected to increase to 5.2 million by 2022.

The continued impact of welfare reforms, families affected by the benefit cap, in-work poverty, and the economic downturn were significant determinants of presenting factors such as, for example, parental mental ill health, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and child neglect. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was reported by respondents to be extremely concerning in terms of exacerbating disadvantage for children and their families, but also the future impact on children's services in providing the necessary safeguarding and wellbeing support.

"The population in [local authority] is a young population with 40% being aged under 25 years. This remains fairly static, but the demographics of those children is changing in terms of the number of children living in poverty. This is as high as 50% and the impact of Covid will see more children trapped in poverty. The effects of poverty lead to poorer outcomes for children than those from wealthier backgrounds with poorer aspirations career-wise and poorer health. This trap and the gap widening for our population has raised our awareness as regards the link between poverty and neglect. The offer for those children living in neglectful situations is a key priority for those in children's social care and key partners. A strategic action plan has been devised to support and measure our outcomes in this area." - *North West LA*

Children and families experiencing poverty are accessing support:

- No recourse to public funds: Across the 44 respondents providing valid information, £11.6m was spent under Section 17 on 1,642 families in 2019/20. Two of the authorities each spent over £1m in the year. The total spend per family varies significantly, the largest number of families supported by any one local authority is in London, with two London authorities supporting over 200 families each. NRPF Connect annual report indicates that 66 local authorities supported 2,450 households at an annual cost to those local authorities of £44 million in 2019/20 and predict that the rates are likely to remain high. (NRPF Connect, 2020)
- In January 2020, 17.3% of all school pupils were eligible for benefits-related free school meals, an increase from 13.6% in 2018 (DfE, 2020). These pupils and their families needed additional financial or other support to replace free school meals while schools were closed and during school holidays
- Research by the Trussel Trust highlights a range of evidence for a substantial increase in food insecurity and use of food banks during the first quarter of 2020-21. Families with dependent children are over-represented in those using food banks (Trussel Trust, 2020). This subject has been the focus of much media attention and some policy action, but much of the responsibility for ensuring access to food has rested with local authorities and their partners

- Other support, specific to the Covid-19 pandemic, includes a temporary uplift in Universal Credit of £20 per week; free school meals for children in families with no recourse to public funds, Winter Grant to local authorities from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the DfE holiday activity and food programme (HAF).

14.1.3 Housing

Nationally, there has been a 31% increase in the number of families who are statutorily homeless. The first ‘lockdown’ response to the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 meant that the housing situation of families with children became an even more influential factor in children’s safety and wellbeing. Data for the period January to March 2020 gives us an indication of the housing situations of families with dependent children relying on public services to provide them housing, prior to lockdown. Between January and March 2020:

- There were 6,260 families assessed as being in priority need of housing due to having dependent children. This is a 25% increase on the same period in 2019, but lower than the same figure in 2018 (MHCLG, 2020b)
- There were 62,610 households with children in temporary accommodation, a 2% rise on the same quarter in 2019, continuing the slowly rising trend since March 2018 (MHCLG, 2020b). Of these families:
 - 2% were in bed and breakfast accommodation (reduced from 4% in 2018)
 - 28% were in nightly paid self-contained accommodation (no change from 2018)
 - The majority of the remainder were housed in private or local authority accommodation.

Strikingly, more than 25,000 families in temporary housing were accommodated outside of their borough in the first three months of 2020 (40% compared to 36% in 2018). (MHCLG, 2020b). This evidences the increased pressures that the ‘receiving’ authorities raise as a concern. Importantly, the difficulties faced by these families will have been exacerbated by lack of access to family and friend networks of support.

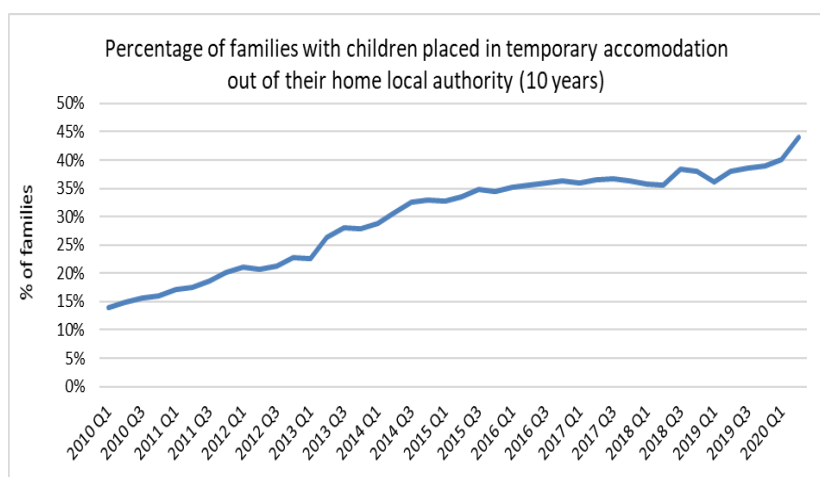


Figure 57: Families with children placed in temporary accommodation outside their home authority

There was some change in the number of families in temporary accommodation in the first 3 months of lockdown, from April to June 2020. The most significant rise being families placed out of the local authority area, rising from 40% of all families in temporary accommodation to 44%.

14.1.4 Employment and benefits

In August 2020, there were 2.7 million more people claiming Universal Credit than in March 2020 (a 90% increase). 3.6 million people made Universal Credit claims between March and October 2020. These claimants were most likely to be single people or couples without children ([DWP, 2020a](#)). Approximately 140,000 households with dependent children had their benefits capped of which:

- 60% were single parents
- Nearly 50% had a child aged 0 to 5 years
- 40% had three or more children in the household. ([DWP, 2020b](#)).

The impact of welfare reforms and the lack of affordable secure housing have increased the numbers of children living in poverty and at risk of adverse childhood experiences. This is, respondents believe, a significant determinant of increased demand for early help and social care services.

14.2 Parental capacity and needs

14.2.1 Prevalence

Adults experiencing domestic abuse, mental health difficulties or substance misuse, remain the most common reasons why children come to the attention of early help and/or children's social care services.

Chowdry (2018) provides estimates of the numbers of children living in households with adults experiencing domestic abuse, mental health difficulties or substance misuse, and the numbers of children living with adults experiencing more than one of these challenges:

- More than 25% 0-15 year olds live with an adult who has ever experienced domestic abuse, of whom 4% has been in the last year
- 30% of children live with an adult with moderate or high mental ill-health symptoms
- 10% of children live with an adult reporting substance misuse
- 15% live with two or more of these issues while 4% live with all three.

The Children's Commissioner estimates that almost 400,000 children were living in a household where substance misuse, domestic abuse or moderate to severe mental illness had

ever been reported and almost 100,000 where these three factors were current or recent. (Children’s Commissioner, 2019). The impact of parental capacity on the safety and wellbeing of children was also evidenced in the key themes from the Triennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews where the top factors in case reviews were: domestic abuse (59%); mental health (55%); alcohol abuse (36%); drug and alcohol abuse (36%); and poverty (35%) (Brandon et al, 2020).

The evidence gained through ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research affirms the impact on children and on services of a lack of parental capacity in providing an adequate caregiving environment. However, this lack of capacity is likely to stem from wider socio-economic determinants.

All respondents cited domestic abuse, parental mental health issues, and parental drug or alcohol misuse as major factors in either abuse and neglect, or children requiring early help or social care services.

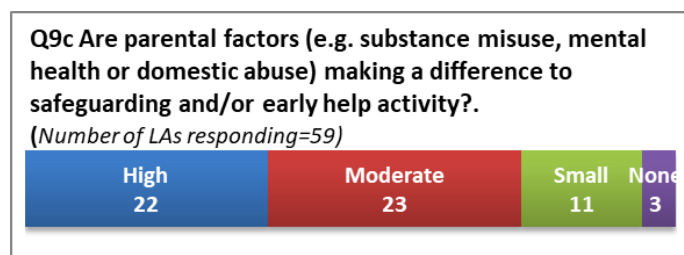


Figure 58: Responses to qualitative question 9c

Of all parental factors, domestic abuse was cited as the most prevalent, and is a prominent factor in re-referral and repeat child protection plans, showing how difficult it is to achieve sustainable change in circumstances where domestic abuse is present.

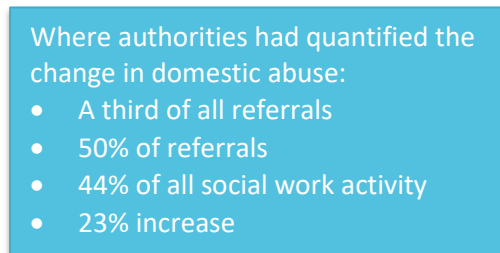


Figure 59: Quantifying domestic abuse

Local authorities reported a variety of ways in which they are tackling the impacts on children of these factors, two examples of which are provided below:

- An expanded Family Drug and Alcohol Court, substance misuse, domestic abuse and adult mental health specialists based in the early help hubs, providing specialist and targeted services to support parents/carers with these issues
- Embedding adult workers (parental substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse) within children's social care, which has enabled the authority to work with families at the earliest opportunity to address parental factors to support the cycle of change.

System factors

14.2.2 Needs identified in early help and social care

Early help

There is no statutory requirement to record information about early help services. This means that there is significant variation in the ways in which local authorities record reasons for early help and presenting issues. Respondents were asked to categorise their reasons for early help, some reporting multiple reasons per assessment and others reporting a single, prevalent reason per assessment. This is likely to be an under-estimate of the level of need in each category.

Number of Early Help Assessments: most commonly reported needs in authorities:	
Reporting one need:	Reporting multiple needs:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child's behaviour (6,380)• Parenting (4,972)• Domestic abuse (3,985)• Adult mental health (3,011)• Child mental health (2,388)• Child Learning, or physical disability or illness (2,351)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parenting (12,614)• Child's behaviour (11,273)• Child learning or physical disability or illness (10,514)• Adult mental health (7,677)• Domestic abuse (7,689)• Adult learning or physical disability or illness (6,589)

Figure 60: Most commonly reported needs in early help when reporting single need or multiple needs

The difference is clear when comparing the numbers in the most commonly reported categories as a percentage of early help assessments. In particular child health and disability related needs, housing and low income may be under-estimated in authorities only reporting a primary need.

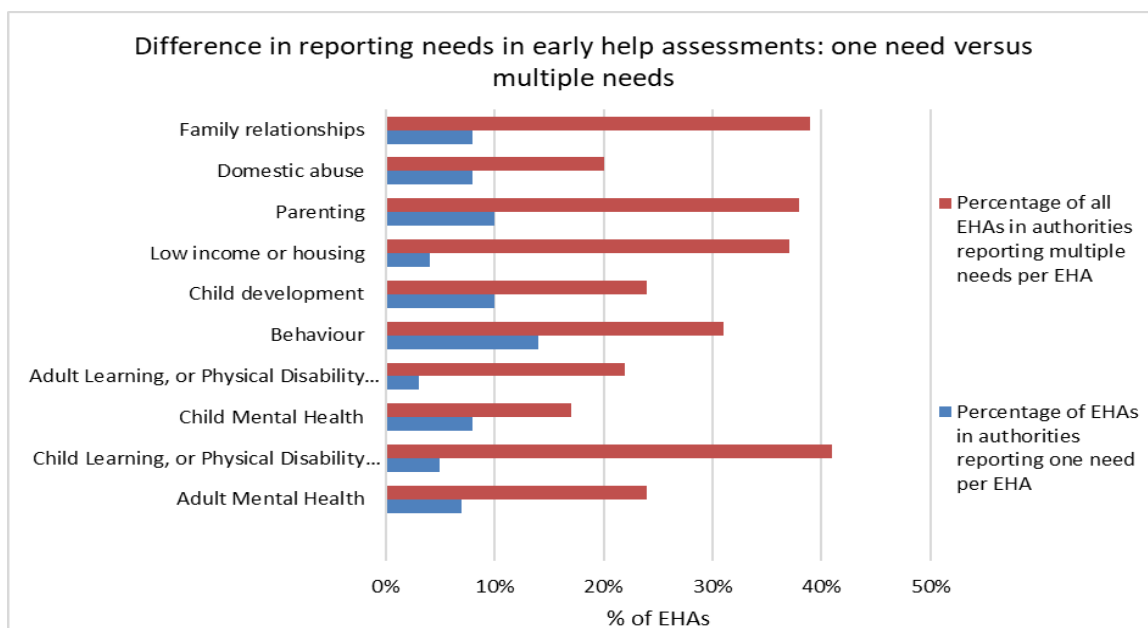


Figure 61: most commonly reported needs in early help – single need or multiple needs. Proportion of EHAS

Referrals

Referrals identify the *predominant* reason for the child coming to the attention of children’s services, recognising that a child is likely to have more than one primary need⁷. This does not capture the detail that respondents told us about the increasing complexity of needs and circumstances of children coming to the attention of social care and as indicators that truly reflect the presenting factors behind referrals to social care, these DfE statutory categories are woefully inadequate.

121 local authorities provided information which indicate that in these responding authorities, 334,930 referrals (64.2%) were primarily for ‘abuse or neglect’ (N1) compared to 55% two years ago. The proportion of referrals for abuse or neglect (N1) has more than doubled since 2007/8. However, the reduction in referrals where the primary need code is ‘not stated’ has reduced dramatically and could account for some of this increase, but not all. Whilst we know there are more children living in poverty, the proportion of referrals for ‘low income’ has continued to be minimal over the past four years, indicating that there are other needs that accompany this.

⁷ DfE guidance stipulates that codes should be selected ‘top down’ so the lower down the list, the less likely it is of being selected. This is important when looking at the data. For example, low income may not be selected if it is deemed that the family is in acute stress. In this example, the recorded need code would be N5 only.

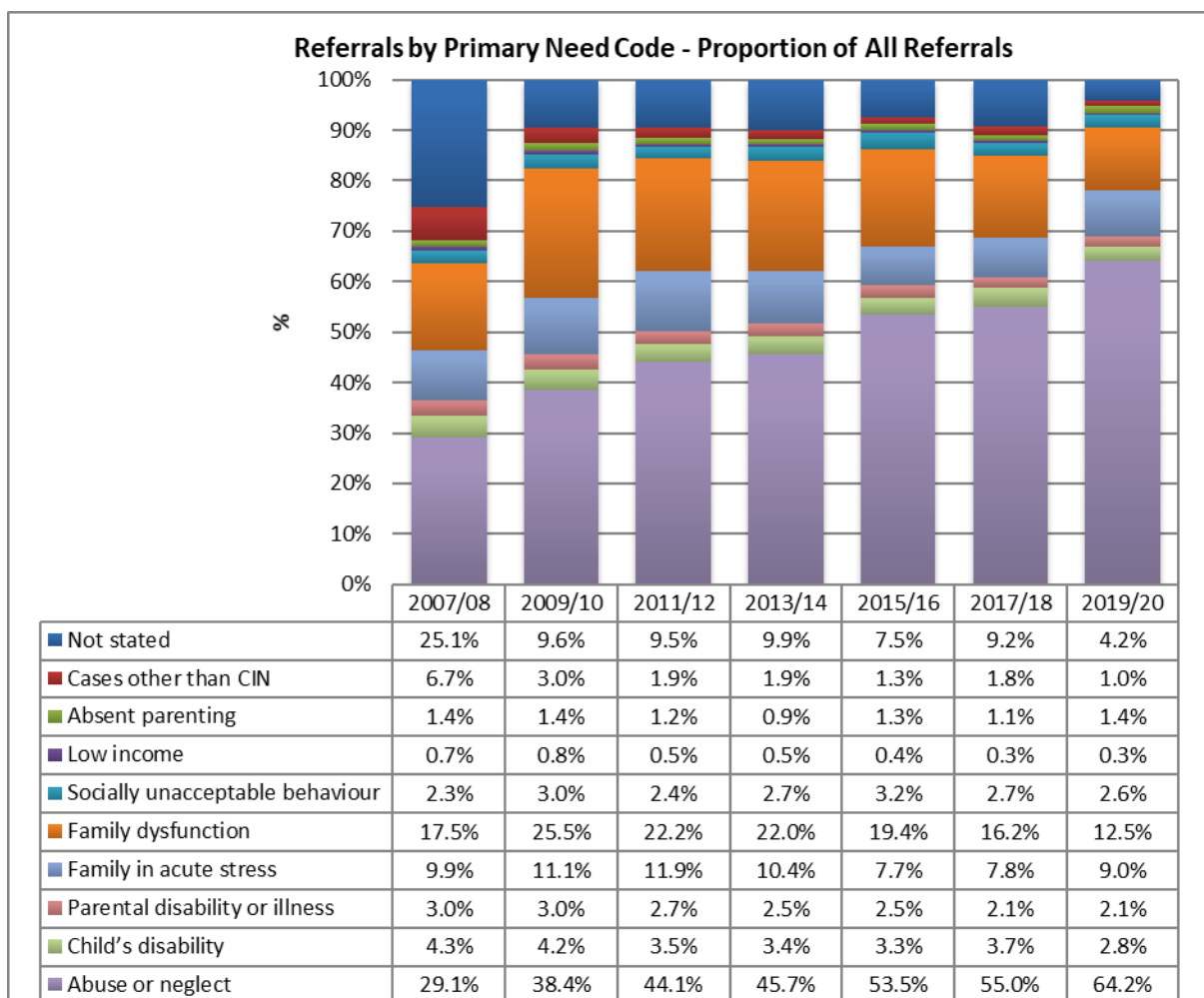


Figure 62: Referrals by category of need – proportion of all referrals

Presenting factors in social care assessment

Parental domestic abuse, parental mental health and emotional abuse continue to be the most prevalent factors in social care assessment, with significant increases over the past two years. Additionally:

- 169,860 assessments of children in the year include a concern about the parent /carer being subject of domestic abuse. It is present in 32.5% of all assessments and an increase of 9.3% from two years ago
- 156,140 assessments of children in the year included parental mental health, 29.9% of all assessments and an increase of 20.8% in the past two years
- 110,300 assessments include emotional abuse as a factor, 21.1% of all assessments
- There has been a 31.9% increase in the past two years of assessments where children's mental health is a factor (75,740 assessments in 2019/20)
- Although smaller numbers, gangs (14,700) and trafficking (3,010) have increased by 69.9% and 45.4% respectively over the past two years.

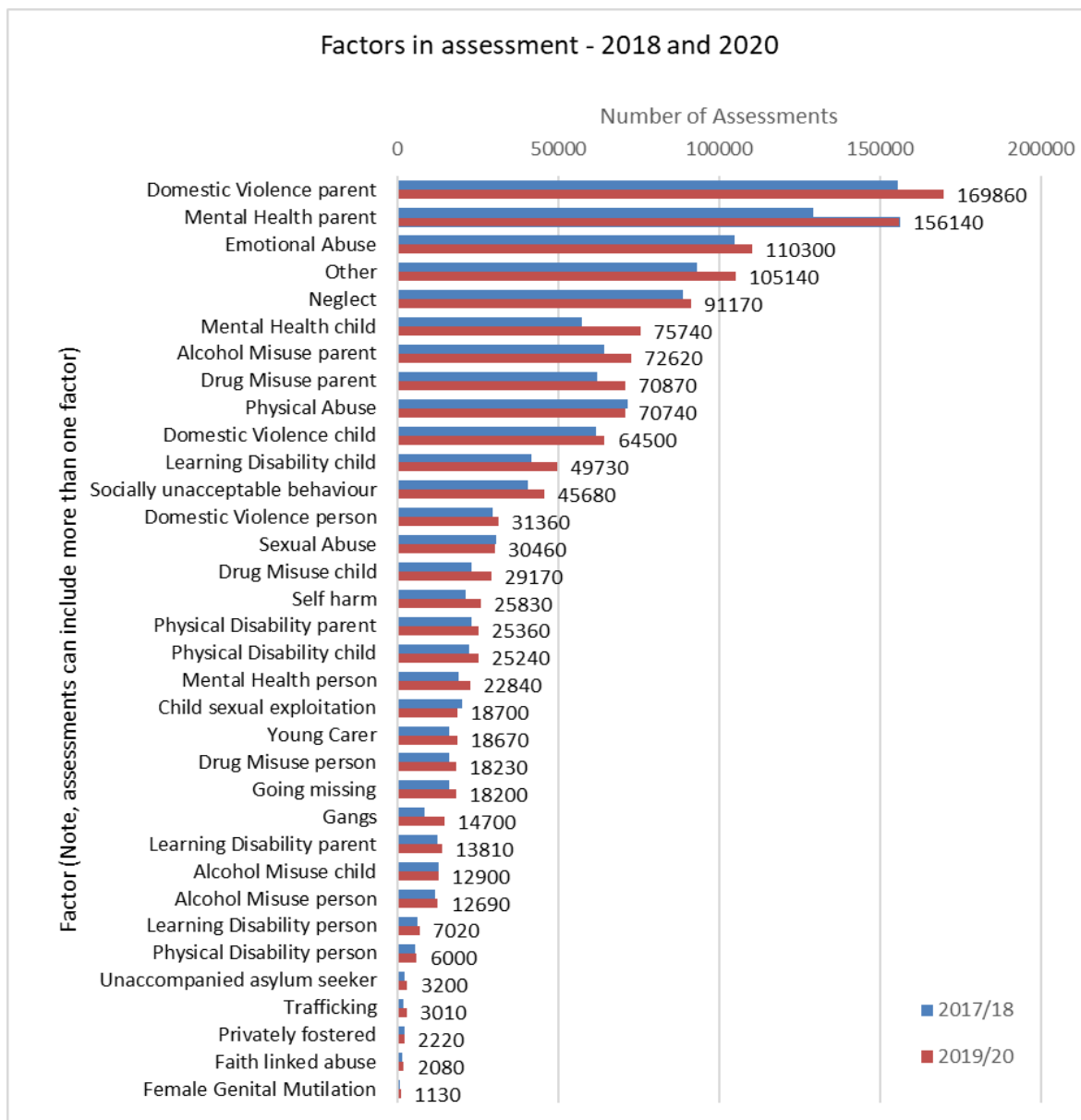


Figure 63: Number of presenting factors in assessments in 2018 and 2020. Data provided for 2020 only

Categories of abuse – child protection plans

More children are subjects of child protection plans for neglect and emotional abuse, and fewer for physical or sexual abuse. Respondents report that 50.1% of initial child protection plans in 2019/20 and 50.2% of plans at 31st March 2020 were categorised as neglect. Whilst the use of the ‘multiple’ category appears to be reducing, some individual local authorities make extensive use of this category rather than assign a single category, with three authorities using ‘multiple/not recommended’ for 25% of their plans, meaning the number of plans for any of the four single categories is likely to be higher.

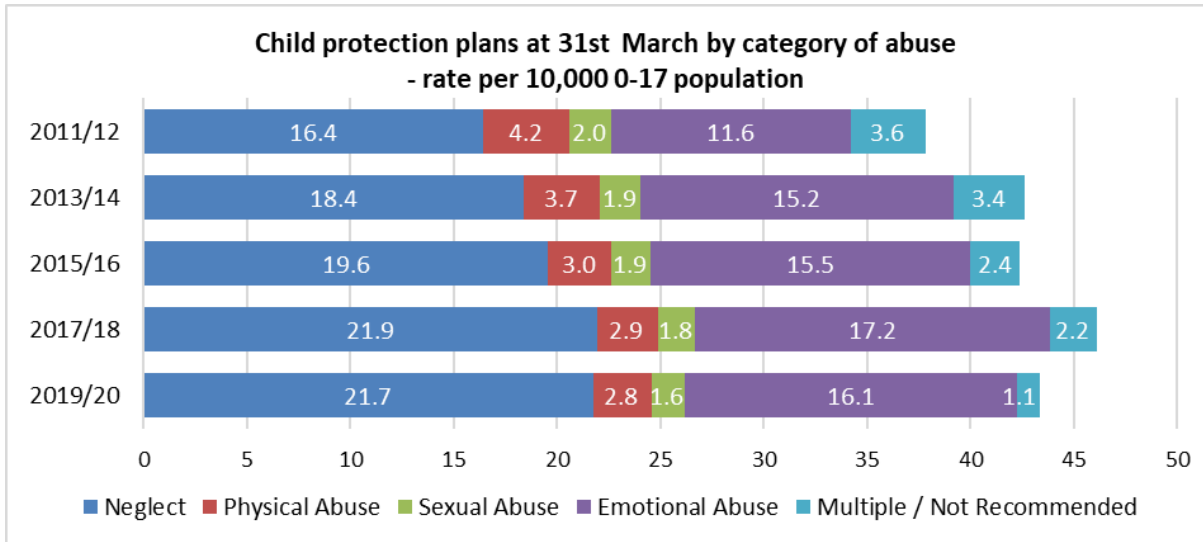


Figure 64: Child protection plans at 31st March by category of abuse (rate per 10,000 0-17 population)

Children starting to be looked after by category of need

The DfE categories for reasons children start to be looked after are the same as referrals, and do not capture the presenting needs or granular intelligence required to understand reasons effectively. 62.5% of all children starting to be looked after were primarily due to reasons of abuse or neglect compared to 60.4% two years ago, and 51% in 2007/8.

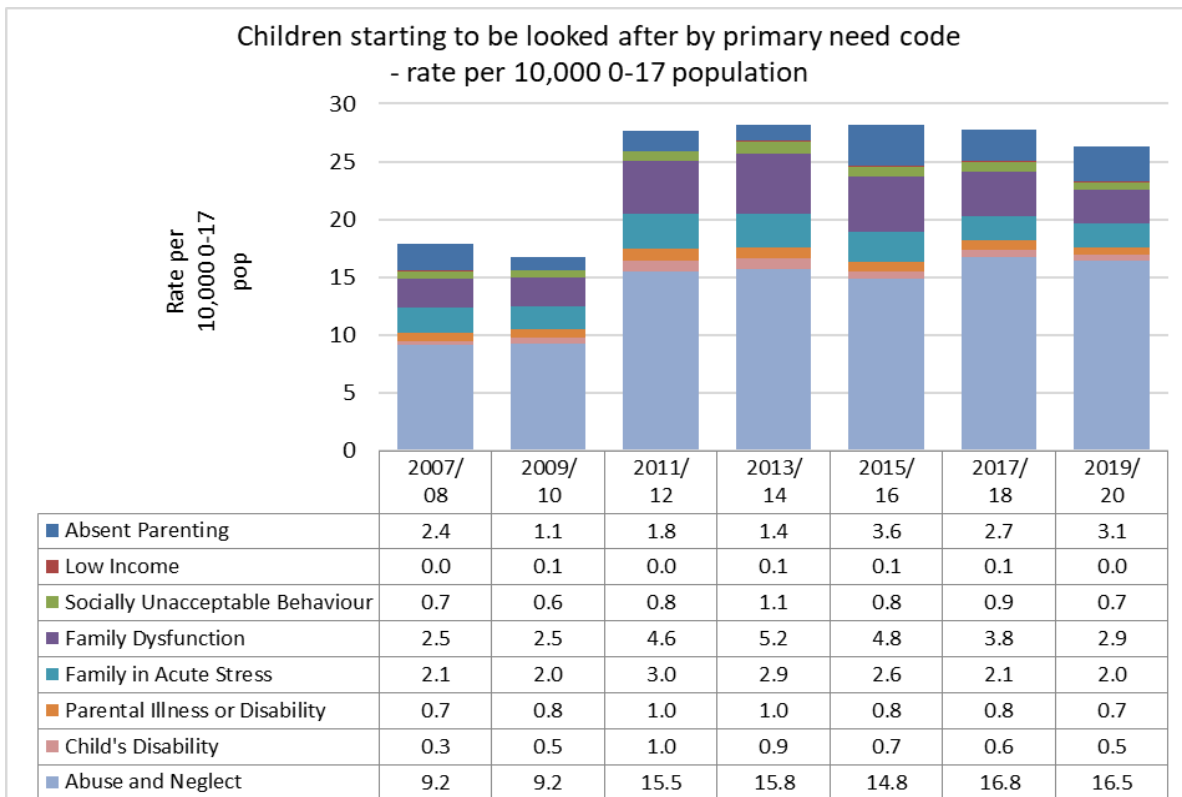


Figure 65 – Children starting to be looked after by primary need code (rate per 10,000 0-17 population)

14.2.3 Key presenting factors

These data illustrate the substantial impact that parenting capacity has on children and on demand across early help and social care. We evidence later in the report that these are commonly issues where children and families struggle to sustain improvements resulting in repeat episodic interventions.

14.3 Ages of children receiving social care services

The ages of children receiving social care support has changed over the years across all those activities where data are available.

14.3.1 Children subjects of initial child protection plans

The age profile of children becoming subjects of a child protection plan has continued to shift towards older children. 3.9% of children starting, and 4.7% of children subject of a child protection plan at 31st March 2020 were aged 16 and over compared to 2.9% in 2013, and 4.3% two years ago

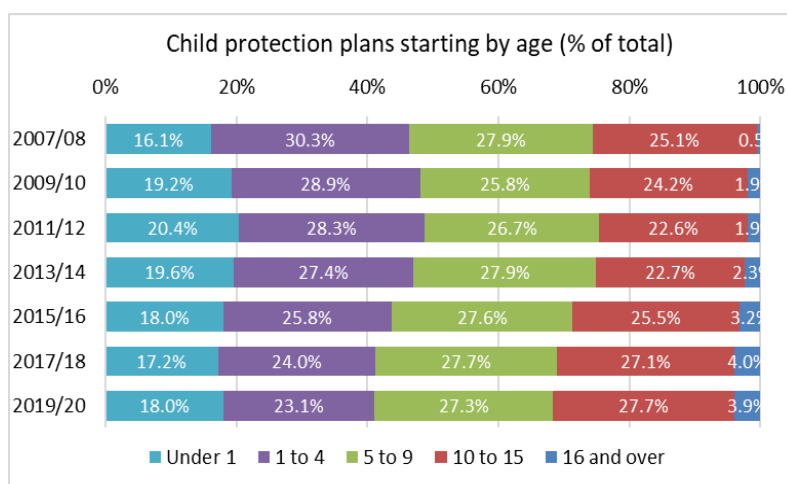


Figure 66: Child protection plans starting in the year – percentage by age

14.3.2 Children looked after

The number of children and young people aged 16-17 who have started to be looked after in 2019/20 continues to increase year-on-year. In the 123 authorities providing valid data, the proportion of under 1s and 1 to 4 age groups has remained fairly steady with increases in the 5-9 and 16 and over age groups.

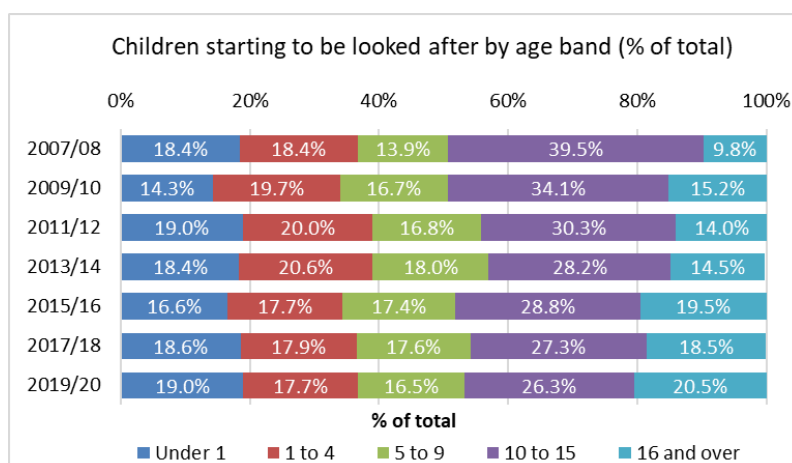


Figure 67: Children starting to be looked after in the year – percentage by age

Children aged 5 to 9 starting to be looked after has reduced from 39.5% to 26.3% of all children starting to be looked after.

43.5% of all children ceasing to be looked after are aged 16 and 17, the majority of whom will become care leavers. The percentages of under 1s and the 10 to 15 year-old cohorts ceasing to be looked after have been relatively stable for the past three years.

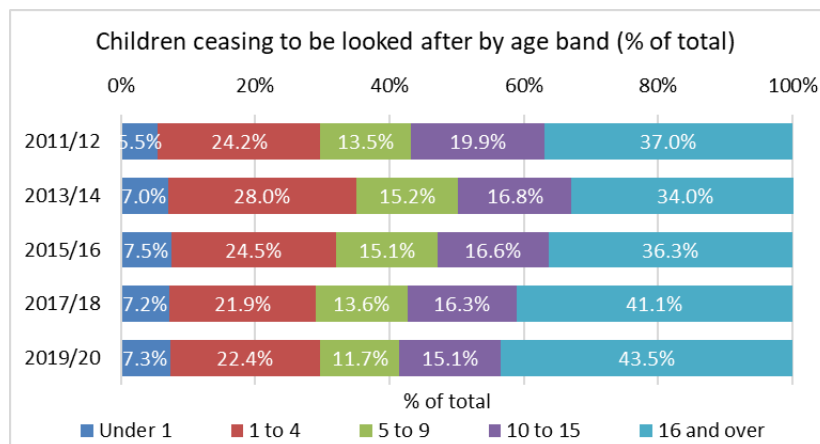


Figure 68: children ceasing to be looked after in the year – percentage by age

DfE (2020) reports that 270 children ceased to be looked after as an age assessment had determined that the child was aged 18 or over. This has changed little in the past two years (270 in 2017/18). These figures relate to UASC.

14.4 Adolescents

The following section highlights some of the factors surrounding the increasing number of adolescents supported by early help and children’s social care.

14.4.1 National context and policy

In Phase 6, we noted that the physiological and psychological changes that occur in puberty can increase adolescents’ appetite for risk-taking behaviour and while this activity is normal and part of healthy development, it can mean that adolescents are sometimes at heightened risk from perpetrators of abuse and exploitation. There has been research and growing expertise in recent years, recognising the increasingly complex risk factors affecting young people. These can stem from two types of factor which are not mutually exclusive:

- Family based: parental conflict, attachment difficulties, homelessness, domestic abuse
- External factors: primarily related to interpersonal relationships, child criminal and sexual exploitation (CCE and CSE), serious youth violence, gang activity (often referred to collectively as ‘contextual safeguarding’).

14.4.2 Exploitation and contextual safeguarding

Most authorities report they have seen increased identification of needs around child exploitation for older young people as national awareness has increased longitudinally. Over the period covered by Safeguarding Pressures research (2007 – 2020), there has been a growing awareness and understanding of the risks and harms facing young people outside of the family home. This includes both sexual and criminal exploitation and the harms associated with gang activity, knife crime and serious youth violence.

A range of reviews have highlighted the complex nature of these issues facing young people, and the threat they pose to their safety. Initially focusing on child sexual exploitation, it is increasingly recognised that young people can also come to harm through involvement in criminal exploitation, in which they are used by gangs and groups to commit crime and in particular to traffic drugs and weapons, known as county lines activity.

The need to consider these risks and harms was made explicit in the 2018 revisions to *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, requiring the statutory safeguarding partners to ensure assessments “*consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child’s life and are a threat to their safety and/or welfare*”, consider the safety and welfare of children alleged of perpetrating harm and focusing interventions on wider environmental factors affecting the safety of young people, whether or not they are known to social care. (DfE, 2020b). In 2018, the Home Office also issued guidance on tackling child criminal exploitation, with a particular focus on county lines activity (Home Office, 2018).

Local authorities have been collecting data on child sexual exploitation as a factor in social care assessments, alongside information about children and young people identified as being involved in gangs or going missing. There is no equivalent collection for criminal exploitation. Since 2018, the number of young people identified as victims of child sexual exploitation has fallen slightly (-7%), while the numbers of young people identified as involved in gangs or being trafficked have both seen significant percentage increases (70% and 45% respectively). In 2019/20, 33,400 children and young people fell into one or more of these categories as a result of a social care assessment (DfE, 2020).

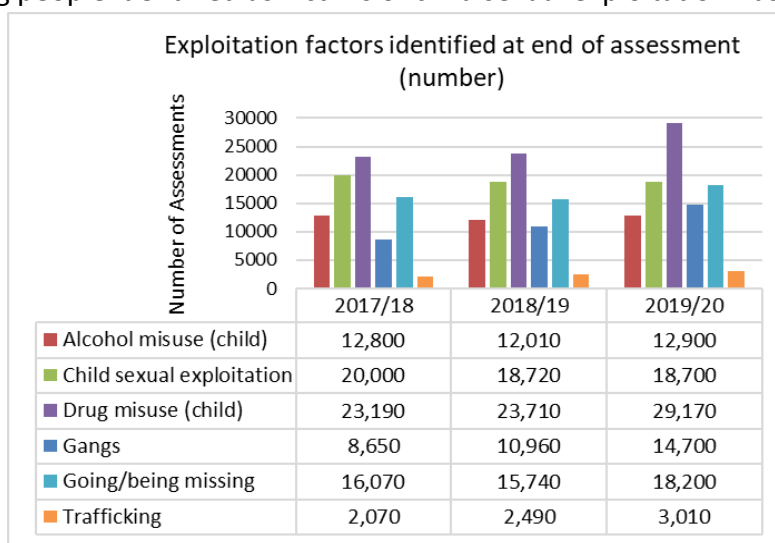


Figure 69 – Exploitation factors identified at end of assessment (Number)

This increase in assessments identifying harm from outside the family home is likely to be a response to the increased policy and inspection focus on criminal exploitation and other forms of extra-familial harm, for example the thematic inspection on CCE (Ofsted, 2020b) and an increase in awareness and recording of such risks.

Local areas have developed tailored responses to manage and reduce these risks, including specialist workers and teams; multi-agency initiatives to disrupt criminal activity; and, the use of sophisticated risk assessment and screening tools to support identification (Kaur and Christie, 2017). These teams might work only with CSE, or CCE or both and may include other forms of extra-familial harm depending on local needs. In parallel, local areas have developed their own arrangements to record and quantify the number of children and young people thought to be victims of exploitation.

As a result, local areas are counting different things and the numbers they report may not be comparable. Responses to the data collection for this research showed:

- Some authorities were only reporting CSE, some were reporting sexual and criminal exploitation together
- Some were reporting all those identified at risk through multi-agency panels, while others were only reporting on exploitation identified as a result of a social care assessment, or those scoring “high” on a risk assessment tool
- Some did not provide any additional definition with their submission.

These definitions change over time within each authority, as reported in the interviews with senior leaders, making identifying trends over time very challenging. Even if these data were standardised and accurate, they would only include those children and young people identified by public services. By focusing on only those children and young people known to social care due to particular forms of exploitation, local areas risk under-estimating the scale of the task in keeping children safe from extra-familial harm.

Example responses provided by local authorities to illustrate this complexity and increase in support include:

- A 13% increase in referrals to the Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group in 2019/20 compared to 2018/19, however total referrals are still around 10% lower compared to 2017/18. In total, 233 young people were open to the Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group during 2019/20
- A significant increase in children considered at risk for child criminal exploitation from 2 in 2018/19 to 45 in 2019/20

- After a significant decrease in referrals for child sexual exploitation in 2018/19, these have increased by 36% this year, and back to the level seen during 2017/18. Alongside this, there has been a much higher number of children considered at high risk, with 12% (18 children) considered high risk of CSE, compared to 5% last year.

“We have experienced increase in overall numbers of children looked after and those referred for CCE, which has increased the number of boys. The comparison data for 2019/20 are significantly higher than the year before and is resultant from broadening of understanding and changes to legislation - CSE cases 113 rising to 199. County Lines impact has been fairly minimal but there has been an upsurge of urban street gang association during the past 12 months from 31 in 2018/19 to 118 in 2019/20. Trafficking cases have also increased by nearly 100% from 8 in 2018 to 15 in 2019.” - *East Midlands LA*

14.4.3 Missing children and young people

112 authorities reported 43,634 children across 105,610 episodes missing *from home* at any point during 2019/20. This is an average of 2.4 episodes per child per year, the same as two years ago.

124 authorities reported 11,038 children and young people missing *from care* at any time during 2019/20, with the average episodes per year increasing year-on-year from 4.9 in 2015/16 to 6.5 in 2019/20. However, it is possible that authorities are recording missing from care differently, for example use of ‘unauthorised’ or ‘away from placement’.

14.4.4 An integrated approach

There has been an emergence of activity over the past few years centred on providing multi-agency wrap-around services for young people, focussing on prevention, better identification of risk, support and disrupting perpetrators. Authorities talked about the services and specialist adolescent hubs that they either have in place, or are developing to support adolescents. This includes No Wrong Door model; use of edge of care services to prevent young people from becoming looked after; and, developing an approach to establish a new transitional safeguarding service to work with 14-25 year olds.

14.5 Timeliness and duration

14.5.1 Timeliness of social care activity

Timeliness of activities such as assessments and reviews have not changed significantly over the past six years, despite significant challenges in the system as a result of an increase in demand. Local authorities continue to operate in a timely and efficient manner.

- The average (median) duration of assessments in 2019/20 was 32 working days. The percentage of assessments completed within the expected 45 working days has changed little during the past six years, ranging between 81.5% and 83.9%
- The proportion of initial child protection conferences held within 15 working days of S47 has improved, from 69.3% in 2013/14 to 78.7% in 2018/19. Despite the rising rates of S47s and ICPCs, the improved timeliness of ICPCs (completed within 15 days of S47 enquiries), demonstrating clearly the efforts made by local authorities to avoid delay and avert drift for children
- The proportion of child protection cases reviewed within the timescales (4 months for first review, six months subsequent reviews) continues to be above 90% with little change.

14.5.2 Duration

There has been little to no change in the duration of episodes of children in need or child protection plans since 2013/14. Comparing the duration of the three main activities illustrates that over half of children in need episodes last for under six months. These averages again mask significant variation across the country demonstrating local authorities have different strategic approaches to the use of Section 17 Children in Need status. 13 authorities have more than 15% of their Children in Need ceasing after 2 years or more.

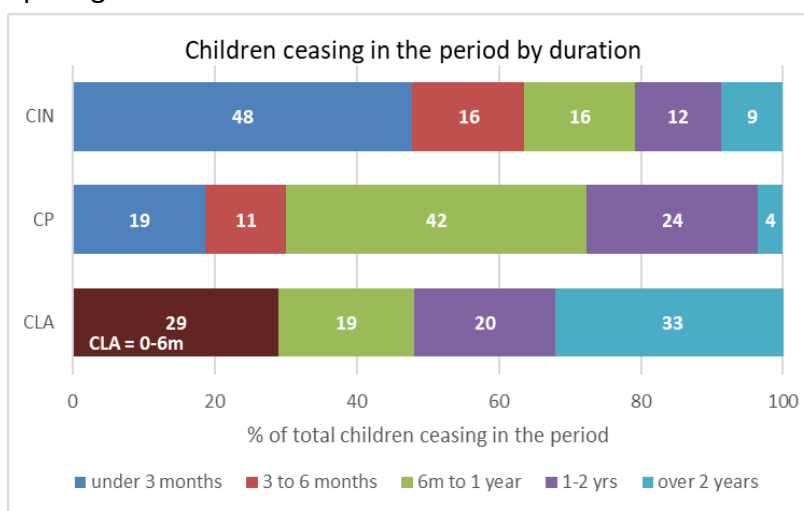


Figure 70: Duration of plans – children in need, child protection and children looked after (% of those ceasing)

14.6 Revolving door

Repeat activity (or revolving door) does not necessarily mean that there is failure in the system to address the needs of children and young people the first time. Some children require multiple interventions over time as circumstances change.

14.6.1 Re-referrals

The proportion of referrals that are re-referrals within 12 months has changed little in the past five years from 21.9% to 22.6%. (DfE, 2020).

14.6.2 Repeat child protection plans

The number of children who are subjects of child protection plans for a second or subsequent time has increased slightly year-on-year to 21.9% in 2019/20 compared to 20.2% in 2017/18 with significant variation between authorities (DfE, 2020). This equates to 14,540 children in England in the year had been subject to two or more child protection plans in the past. This could be for a different or the same reason. There is some perversity in this measure because as time goes on and more children become subjects of child protection plans, there is a greater probability of more children having subsequent plans and therefore the percentage is expected to increase.

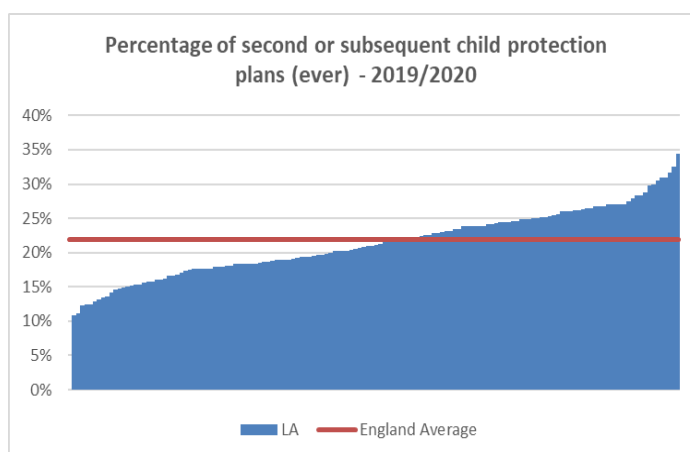


Figure 71: Percentage of second or subsequent plans ever by LA

14.6.3 Children re-entering care for a second or subsequent time

11.4% of children who started to be looked after in 2019/20 had been looked after previously (based on 103 local authorities supplying valid data on entry and re-entry). This is a small decrease from 12.7% in phase 6, but little change in the proportions by age group since 2012/13. Just under a quarter of children starting to be

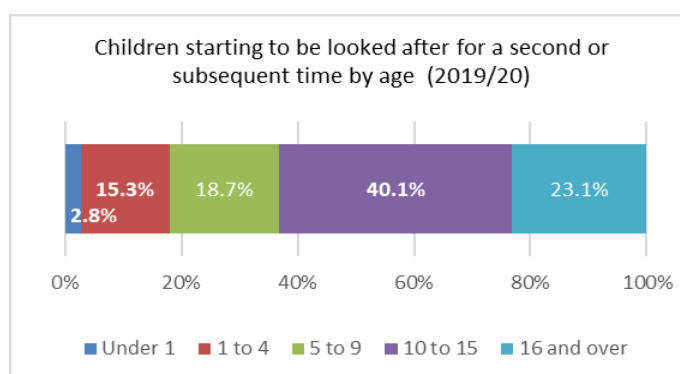


Figure 72: Percentage of children starting to be looked after for a second or subsequent time by age

looked after for a second or subsequent time are aged 16 or 17.

104 authorities provided information for both 2017/18 and 2019/20 about children returning to care having previously achieved permanence through adoption, Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order/Child Arrangement Order. In these authorities, a total of 613 children returned to care after or during their previous permanence arrangement in 2019/20 compared to 487 in the same authorities two years previously.

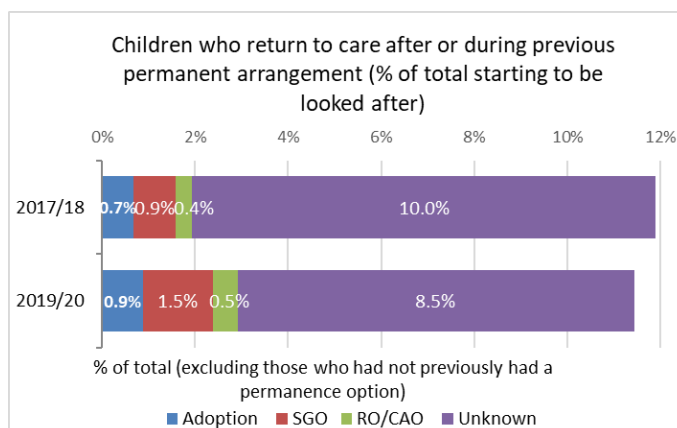


Figure 74: Children looked after for a second or subsequent time by type of permanence arrangement

“In November 2019, we implemented a new system at the front door. A Children's Advice and Duty Service was developed following a piece of research by Professor Thorpe and his team regarding our previous MASH. This research determined that 30% of referrals generated and progressed resulted in closure. The CADS has come to fruition with our referral rate being down by just over 30% as predicted and re-referral rates remaining steady. Relationships with our partners has improved and the 'advice' part of the CADS is well-received and well-used by key agencies to determine threshold and intervention. A recent audit of children subject to second or subsequent plans was undertaken in the summer of 2020 as this was an area of concern. Re-referrals remain at around the regional average, but were predicted to increase after the implementation of CADS. CYP who have been looked after and returned into care is a current focus of collaborative audit activity. The findings of all of the above have been or will be shared with our staff to support good practice. There is a current drive to ensure discharges of care orders are progressed where assessment have determined it is right and proper to do so.” - North West LA

Covid-19 period: April to September 2020

Respondents told us that the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed and is expected to contribute further to the revolving door, especially where there is neglect, parental factors and behavioural issues., Some authorities are already seeing an increase in second or subsequent child protection plans from September 2020.

14.7 Outcomes and reasons for closure of early help and social care activity

14.7.1 Early help

73 respondents provided outcomes (or reasons for case closure) of early help assessments using either the six categories provided or their own. 70 responding authorities reported on whether support was provided as a result of the assessment, 66 on referrals to social care and fewer (42) reported on the other standard categories or their local equivalents. Calculations below are based on the percentage of all outcomes reported where this is different from the total number of early help assessments reported.

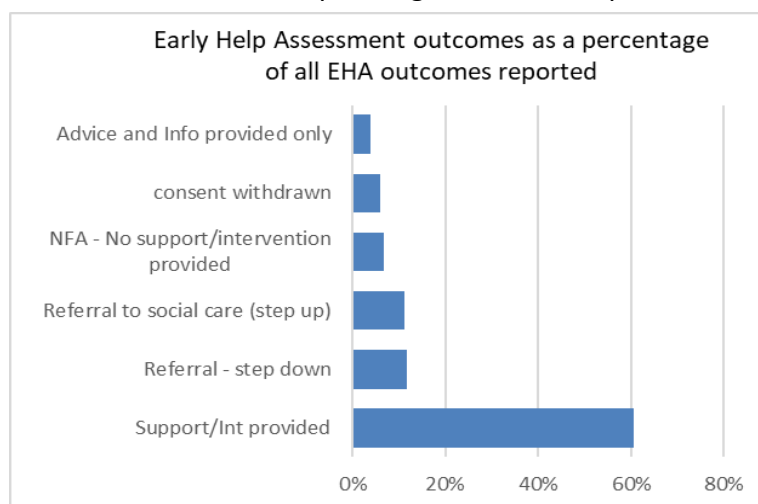


Figure 75: Early Help Assessment outcomes as a percentage of the total

‘Support or intervention provided’ was the outcome in 61% of all assessments where outcomes were reported. 20% of EHAs with a reported outcome were recorded as being ‘stepped down from early help’ and 11% of EHAs resulted in a referral to children’s social care in the 68 authorities reporting this as an outcome. 11% of EHAs resulted in an outcome of NFA in the 42 authorities reporting this outcome.

14.7.2 Social care ‘front door’

Local authorities were asked to provide information on the outcomes of initial contacts to understand the proportion that go on to social care referrals. Changes in front door arrangements are clearly evidenced from the chart below which shows that although the proportion of initial contacts which are ‘no further action (NFA)’ remains fairly constant at 24% to 25%, the proportion going on to social care referrals has decreased from 30.4% in 2012/13 to 25% in 2019/20 and pass to early help services from 0% to 15.9%.

74% of referrals in responding authorities led to a social care assessment, a similar proportion to two years ago. However, there was an increase in referrals with an outcome of ‘strategy discussions and / or S47 enquiry’ (15.1%) in 2019/20 compared to 11.5% in 2017/18. Referrals with an outcome of ‘no further action’ have reduced consistently over the past 12 years. Only 6.3% of referrals were NFA in 2019/20 (DfE, 2020).

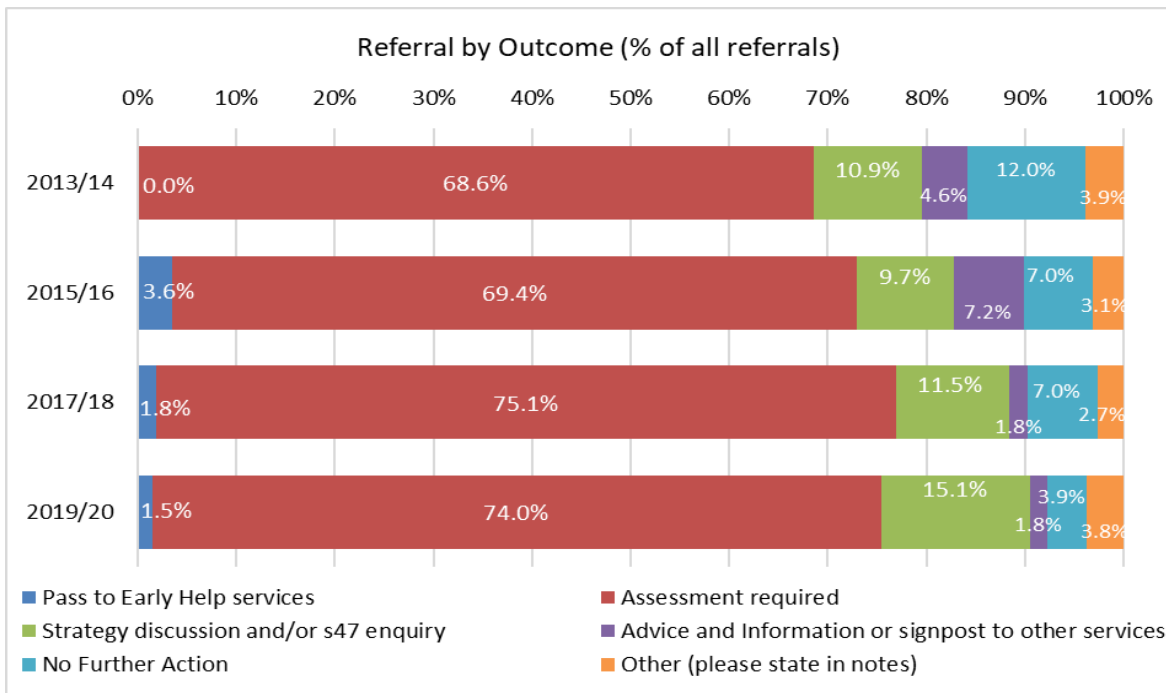


Figure 76: Referrals by outcome – proportion of all referrals (source: SGP7 respondents)

30.2% of social care assessments have an outcome of ‘no further action’, an increase on previous years (DfE, 2020). ‘No further action’ means ‘no statutory social work intervention required’, not that there was no support offered.

The findings illustrate differences between authorities in what is recorded as the outcome of a referral. Variations in ‘front door’ models, where for example combined early help and social care referral points are in place, may mean that referrals going to early help or are NFA will have done so at initial contact stage and referrals therefore progress to child in need or child protection mechanisms.

14.7.3 Children ceasing to be looked after by reason

DfE categories of reasons for children leaving care have changed over time and now provide greater detail relating to some reasons. For example, ‘age assessment determined child aged 18 or over’ provides us with information about UASC who have become looked after but are in fact adults. Whilst these changes are important, they make comparison over the years difficult, and analysis below therefore shows only high level categories over time, and the detail for 2019/20.

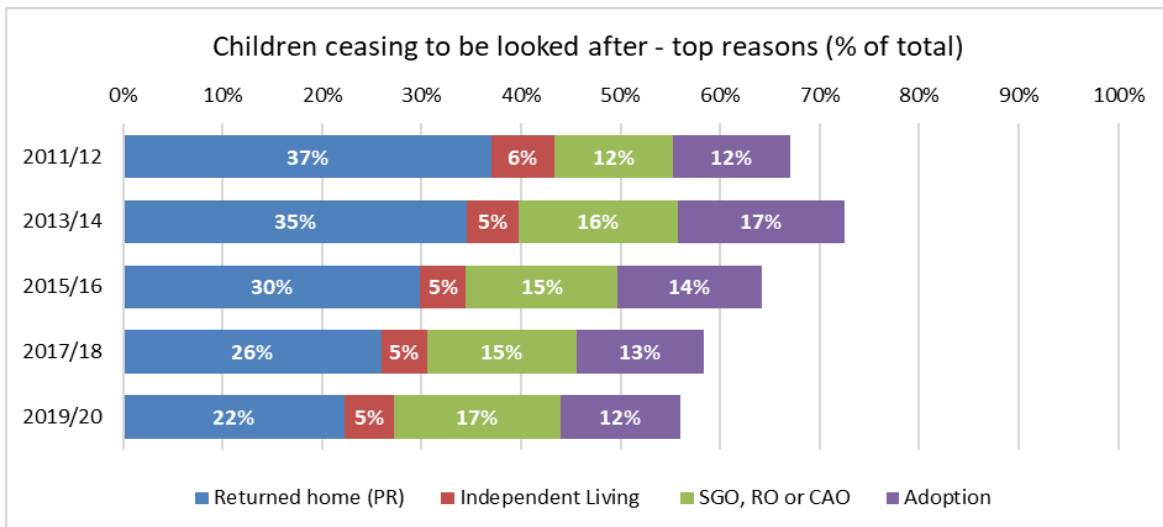


Figure 77: Children leaving care by reason ceased - main grouped reasons. SGO = Special Guardianship Order, RO = Residence Order, CAO = Child Arrangement Order.

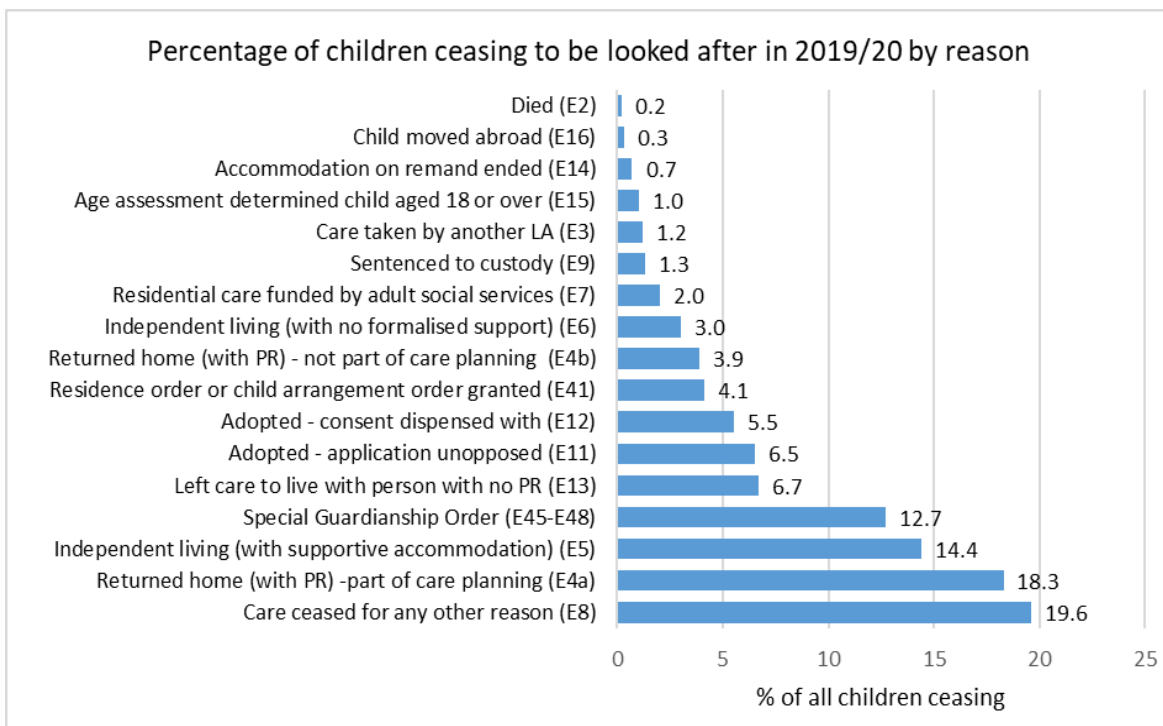


Figure 78 – Percentage of children ceasing to be looked after by reason. Source: SGP7 respondents

116 authorities provided valid data on reasons for children leaving care. A high proportion (20% in 2019/20) of children who cease to be looked after for ‘any other reason’ means that we do not know specifically why a fifth of children leave care. More children leave care to return home to live with parents than for any other reason (22%). However, the proportion of children who do so has reduced consistently over the years. Of those children who return home, 18% do so to live with parents/other person with parental responsibility as part of the care planning process, and 4% who return home do so outside of the care plan for the child. 560 children moved to the care of another local authority, and we surmise the majority of these are likely to be UASC.

14.7.4 A system view

The chart below maps the closure reasons throughout early help and social care to show the journey of the child through the system, and how much results in no further action. For every 10,000 children:

CLOSURE REASONS EARLY HELP TO CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER												
Early Help Assessments												
Referral to social care (step up)	Referral - step down	Advice and Info provided only	Support/ intervention provided	Consent withdrawn	NFA - No support/ intervention	Other						
21	0	0	115	11	13	9						
11%	11%	4%	59%	6%	6%	4%						
Contacts												
Referral to Social Care	Pass to Early Help services	Advice and Info / signpost	NFA	Other								
509	325	537	491	179								
25%	16%	26%	24%	9%								
Referrals												
Strategy and/or s47 enquiry	Assessment required	Pass to Early Help services	Advice/Info or signpost elsewhere	No Further Action	Other							
83	406	8	10	21	21							
15%	74%	1%	2%	4%	4%							
Children in need												
Adopted	Died	Residence Order	Special Guardianship Order	Transfer to another LA	Transfer to Adult Social Services	Other incl. no longer in need	Unknown					
2.4	0.7	0.5	2.1	10.2	2.1	288.4	2.2					
1%	0%	0%	1%	3%	1%	93%	1%					
Children looked after												
Returned home (with PR)	Left care to live with person with no PR	Residence or child arrangement order	Special Guardianship Order	Adopted	Independent living	Accommodation on remand ended	Sentenced to custody	Care taken by another LA	Residential care funded by adult services	Age assessment - child aged 18+	Care ceased other reason	
5.4	1.6	1.0	3.1	2.9	4.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2	4.9	
22%	7%	4%	13%	12%	17%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	20%	

Figure 79: Outcomes (closure reasons) across early help and social care activity (2019/20). The top number represents the rate per 10,000 0-17 population and the bottom number is the % of total outcomes, with a data bar illustrating that percentage.

14.8 Correlating activity across children's services

14.8.1 Comparing activity

Comparing the levels of children's social care activity over the past twelve years shows clearly the increase in early help assessments, initial contacts and section 47 enquiries. The significant increase in initial contacts and Section 47 enquiries at a greater rate than for other activity, is stark.

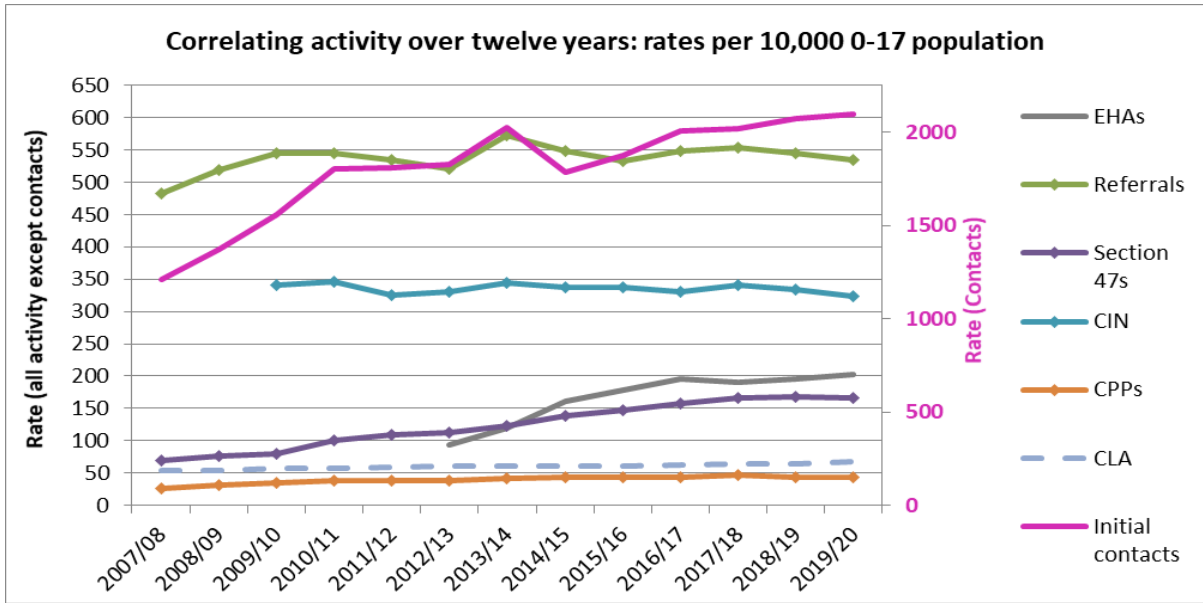


Figure 80 - Correlating activity over twelve years

A heatmap of 129 local authorities for all metrics in Phase 7, reinforces this evidence for many authorities, but not all (see figure below)⁸, that local areas with the highest deprivation are likely to undertake more social care activity.

Region	IDACI Average Score	Population Change (12 Yrs)	2019/20 rates per 10,000 0-17 population											
			EHAs	Contacts	Referrals	Assessments	CIN at 31 st March	S47s	Starting CP	CP Plan at 31 st March	Starting to be looked after	Looked after at 31 st March	UASC at 31 st March	Care Leavers (17-21) at 31 st March
NE	0.3	3%	561	3994	1169	1302	870	514	151	116	90	189	0.91	48.2
NW	0.3	-2%	437	3882	1307	1322	646	468	156	124	86	223	1.71	64.7
NW	0.3	-4%	553	2384	426	611	325	193	60	51	23	91	0.59	34.3
NW	0.3	4%	309	1914	677	796	433	192	70	57	44	148	12.29	52.8
Y&H	0.3	2%	305	2567	765	605	661	408	106	90	58	151	6.28	48.6
EM	0.3	18%	243	3250	633	847	477	301	105	89	36	95	4.49	50.5
NW	0.3	22%		3507	604	670	434	226	69	59	50	114	8.46	55.9
NE	0.3	-5%	359	2307	775	842	696	361	116	92	72	158	2.99	47.9
WM	0.3	10%	35	1262	463	368	305	142	52	44	23	67	2.71	37.4
L	0.3	22%	260	2751	530	563	483	200	48	47	45	86	13.44	86.0
Y&H	0.3	-4%		3405	1120	1208	679	425	134	118	76	166	5.21	35.6
WM	0.3	13%	413	562	534	568	346	163	55	42	20	94	1.45	37.1
NE	0.3	-3%	263	2987	636	537	446	131	76	62	30	97	0.00	41.4
WM	0.3	11%	61	1311	633	637		182	64	35	34	97	2.03	30.2
WM	0.3	8%	462	2660	1028	1258	609	359	129	85	44	158	3.45	39.5
NE	0.3	-7%	88	3469	764	797	637	354	130	94	55	126	4.71	34.4
NE	0.2	10%	399	4052	774	885	491	280	115	100	37	113	1.54	47.4
NE	0.2	-5%	299	3669	659	666	409	314	113	67	49	106	0.91	40.7
EM	0.2	14%	146	1836	322	386	233	170	58	38	23	73	0.59	33.7
NW	0.2	20%	99	3645	752	747	418	247	95	95	33	97	2.26	46.8
NW	0.2	2%	259	2784	547	596	399	251	64	53	32	97	0.70	33.7
NW	0.2	4%	537	914	689	738	475	147	65	62	22	100	3.00	33.6
NW	0.2	6%		949	650	776	414	239	72	65		86	0.67	31.0
L	0.2	15%	82	2240	589	613	384	154	48	37	32	69	6.71	58.1
L	0.2	7%	49	2064	558	594	390	173	54	37	28	58	7.89	61.7
NW	0.2	1%	283	2781	523	780	396	218	90	57	39	106	0.52	36.4
Y&H	0.2	2%	310	2335	627	1000	364	185	60	45	27	75	0.30	38.0
Y&H	0.2	10%	119	2247	697	981	373	299	83	67	36	87	1.54	26.1
Y&H	0.2	4%	242	683	536	527	354	223	78	56	25	59	0.00	17.4
L	0.2	17%	177	3693	886	622	282	165	34	21	27	44	5.46	38.8
NW	0.2	5%	90	1946	519	667	439	223	81	71	51	139	1.97	47.0
NE	0.2	0%	530	2454	586	585	350	163	66	44	41	90	0.10	25.5
Y&H	0.2	1%		2713	655	923	455	371	118	78	37	103	0.52	41.5
Y&H	0.2	7%	381	2196	579	583	328	199	80	61	23	53	1.27	29.4
NW	0.2	7%	300	1504	615	541	307	179	56	46	29	92	0.29	30.1
WM	0.2	19%	97	3051	675	605	429	249	65	50	33	88		46.6
NW	0.2	-3%	278	2235	592	734	369	182	55	42	28	120	0.89	40.3
WM	0.2	6%			503	556	358	213	75	58	26	98		25.8
L	0.2	22%	145	1137	500	527	332	140	36		25	67	4.06	49.1
EM	0.2	9%	243	4195	768	631	447	242	72	64	36	98	3.34	45.4
NE	0.2	3%	90	1997	710	727	526		108	80	49	131	0.23	34.2
L	0.2	10%	362	2094	564	499		151	37	26	30	67	6.52	51.3
E	0.2	26%	254	2764	690	483	303	140	51	36	30	72	3.86	47.1
WM	0.2	3%			578	551	318	173	61	51	18	90	0.58	36.2
SW	0.2	15%	183	2566	484	438	263	121	45	31	22	66	5.21	43.6
NE	0.2	-1%	411	3105	399	508	385		80	70	41	105	0.25	40.4
Y&H	0.2	13%	48	1559	644	586	328	115	47	34	26	79	2.60	33.7
SE	0.2	10%	74	3168	609	592	380	296	68	46	41	106	22.17	57.8
L	0.2	19%	52	2015	572	502	392	185	49	43	27	48	7.67	46.0
Y&H	0.2	6%	192	1976	1017	1333	422		100	73	35	87	1.90	34.1
Y&H	0.2	2%	39	1984	670	970	309	259	67	59	21	72	1.08	27.8
E	0.2	19%	230	1575	503	549	349	223	55	43	24	67	4.87	47.0
L	0.2	18%	364	2414	624	573	304	141	33	31	25	46	7.64	41.6
E	0.2	10%	343	2613	686	796	320	173	48	41	29	79	3.52	43.3
SE	0.2	6%	187	1574	755	734	355	273	90	71	27	66	1.23	27.5
NW	0.2	-6%		1433	492	583	420	125	57	48	31	105	1.48	35.1
L	0.2	18%		1845	427	451	361	190	46	38	41	68	11.34	62.4
E	0.2	22%		1481	633	986	409	189	48	38	52	67	4.03	56.2
L	0.2	14%	197	1810	563	566	457	183	70	52	38	83	26.33	95.8

Region	IDACI Average Score	Population Change (12 Yrs)	2019/20 rates per 10,000 0-17 population												
			EHAs	Contacts	Referrals	Assessments	CIN at 31 st March	S47s	Starting CP	CP Plan at 31 st March	Starting to be looked after	Looked after at 31 st March	UASC at 31 st March	Care Leavers (17-21) at 31 st March	
Y&H	0.2	1%	106	339	398	422	280	124	35	20	14	65	3.09	31.1	
L	0.2	21%	106	2580	514	471	309	171	43	33	22	38	5.92	41.7	
NE	0.2	4%	253	2590		340	348	94	44	33	38	71		38.5	
Y&H	0.2	5%	146	1719	440	563	226	183	60	40	25	67	0.60	28.4	
NW	0.2	2%	192	2622	811	795	473	193	69	55	32	77	0.44	24.7	
NE	0.2	-7%	270	2582	446	636	415	234	105	80	34	73	0.00	27.1	
L	0.2	25%	246	2906	444	513	296	130	37	29	22	41	5.21	42.6	
NW	0.2	1%	398	2098	424		339	144	50	33	28	83	1.16	32.7	
L	0.2	17%	103	1722	649	627	415	159		24	23	40	4.02	40.8	
EM	0.2	5%	102	3154	452	461	253	106	35	24	20	42	1.30	27.4	
SW	0.2	5%	261	819	479	515	296	116	43	38		44	0.37	23.8	
SE	0.2	1%	161	1971	392	326	308	125	56	50	16	56	4.51	25.9	
L	0.2	8%	129	2311	490	530	308	120	38	26	21	39	4.55	42.7	
SE	0.2	21%	221	3366	693	726	393	234	68	61	31	76	4.05	35.4	
SE	0.2	9%	305	2318	650	602	306	192	44	39	26	53	12.88	50.9	
E	0.2	5%	173		436	451		152	47	38	20	64	6.41	34.5	
EM	0.2	3%	218	2074	668	640		201	62	48	21	55	1.01	26.0	
L	0.2	27%	175	2084	585	556	314	223	49	36	24	43	4.96	45.5	
SE	0.2	4%	206	3211	710	548	361	168	78	67	31	74	6.96	60.5	
EM	0.2	-4%	94	2075	734	794	360	198	74	62	26	56	1.49	25.9	
E	0.2	16%	290	2270	431	448	320	129	48	38	27	62	6.39	38.8	
SE	0.2	22%	395	1509	449	444	344	119	33	19	24	59	3.34	30.4	
WM	0.1	3%			644	351	311	141	37	32	31	97	11.78	46.3	
SE	0.1	33%	273	2966	589	576	369	300	74	70	25	45	0.93	30.6	
NW	0.1	4%	465	1738	527	553	351	117	47	33		58	0.16	24.4	
E	0.1	6%		824	256	274	201		24	18	14	34	0.00	25.4	
WM	0.1	1%	150	895	454	469	275	158	64	44	19	69	1.94	33.2	
EM	0.1	12%	69	2238	787	538	313	171	63	49		68	4.14	41.3	
NW	0.1	-7%		1614	442	561	299	170	76	67	23	78	1.08	23.5	
E	0.1	2%	292	2362	426	414	255	121	44	30	25	61	4.62	36.0	
NW	0.1	1%		1779	376	387	287	141	38	31	27	82	3.83	34.5	
WM	0.1	-3%	189		424	554	332	111	53	37	22	72	2.76	34.4	
L	0.1	11%		1189	511	479	323	109	55	39	17	44	0.93	32.1	
L	0.1	5%	108		839	442	279	88	24	15	24	37	14.18	45.3	
SW	0.1	5%	72	2349	652	704	312	235	74	56	27	57	1.78	27.4	
WM	0.1	-2%	266	1513	366	431	306		59	30	26	97	0.28	35.8	
L	0.1	15%	247	1594	422	433	278	226	66	46	23	31	5.05	32.2	
WM	0.1	-3%	181		314	634	266	180	53	45	17	66	2.00	27.5	
Y&H	0.1	-3%	157	1381	523	384	347	162	48	36	20	54		25.9	
NW	0.1	13%		1815	500	451	251	128	41	36	18	67	0.71	31.5	
E	0.1	13%	219	2194	279	381	201	108	26	24	14	49	6.28		
E	0.1	11%	193	482	197	212	185	49	23	17	14	35	3.38	24.5	
SE	0.1	8%	280	1965	567	594	319	175	64	46	26	46	4.49	29.0	
NW	0.1	1%	221	1272	329	405	272	114	40	33	24	69	1.55	25.1	
EM	0.1	6%	190	1585	389	359	214	109	51	36	17	46	1.62	18.9	
SE	0.1	9%	127	1006	513	480	325	130	51	37	21	52	3.22	27.3	
Y&H	0.1	5%		2147	588	569	338	222	91	65	30	72	1.37	27.8	
L	0.1	24%	71		357	651	247	164	60	54	17	32	5.82	29.6	
Y&H	0.1	-5%	474	1800	326	355	222	64	40	28	12	38	1.19	21.1	
SE	0.1	9%	43	2766	599	539	293	292	65	43	17	50	1.06	28.2	
SE	0.1	11%	89	1580	323	331	218	101	27	26	14	37	2.96	26.0	
L	0.1	20%	63	3539	278	464	177	116	37	35	16	27	4.14	29.2	
SE	0.1	11%	52	3316	390	349		172		38	15	33	0.58	22.2	

Figure 81: Summary of rates of various activities by IDACI score – darker = higher rate.

14.9 Other factors

There continues to be evidence of the ripple effect felt by local authority children’s services stemming from changes to other provision, such as schools, housing and pressures in partner agencies. These include the impact of legislative and policy changes, particularly the requirements of the Children & Families Act 2014 in relation to children with special educational needs and disability (SEND). Meeting the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice (2014) and the cost of provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have placed significant and unsustainable budgetary pressures on local authorities over the past few years.

67 out of 85 (79%) local areas whose SEND inspection reports were published since 1st April 2018 resulted in Written Statements of Action, an indication of significant weaknesses in the areas’ SEND arrangements, spanning provision by the local authority, schools and health services. (ADCS, 2020b). Respondents asserted that this is a reflection of government policy and a funding formula in the High Needs Block that is ‘broken’ rather than the ability of local authorities to meet the requirements of the Code of Practice 2014.

In Phase 6, we reported a 33% increase in the number of children with either a statement or an Education Health and Care Plan since the Children & Families Act 2014 was implemented. Whilst there has been increases in plans for all age groups, the greatest increases are for young people aged over 16. There are now 52% more children and young people with an EHC Plan in 2019/20 than in 2014/15 (149,926 plans).

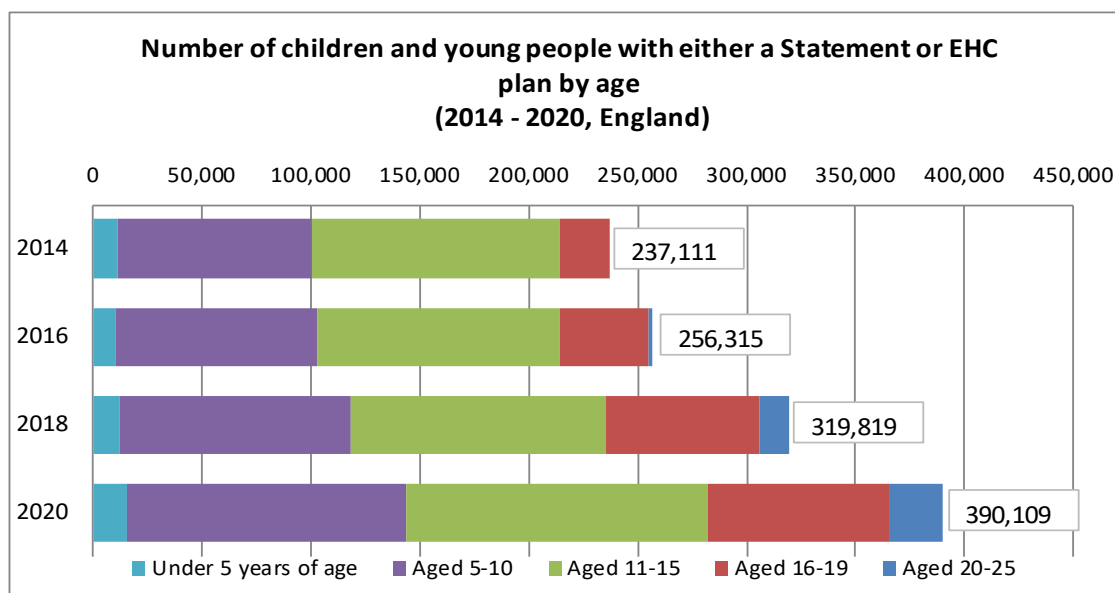


Figure 82: Children and young people with a EHC plan by age. Source: DfE (2020)

14.9.1 Children not in school

There has been a 38% increase in children who are electively home educated in 2020 compared to the previous year, an estimated 75,668 children and young people in England. Startlingly, 19,510 children and young people have become electively home educated since 1st September 2020, as parents elect not to send children back to school at the start of the new academic year. (ADCS 2020c).

15 Workforce

15.1 National context and policy

In 2008, the Department for Children and Families, a predecessor of the DfE, published *The '2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy'* which set out strong ambitions for creating a workforce across children's services with "actions we will take to address the specific challenges faced by different sectors, including new commitments to address current challenges facing the social care and early years and childcare workforce and to improve support for senior leaders and managers in children's services." (DCSF, 2008)

More recently, the government set out its plans to invest in new routes into social work, in the DfE's 2016 paper *Putting children first: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care* (DfE, 2016). The ambition for development of the wider workforce did not materialise. Rather, since 2010 subsequent governments have focussed on the children's social work workforce almost exclusively (as illustrated in the Safeguarding Pressures timeline).

The ADCS Position Paper *'Building a workforce that works for all children'* (ADCS, 2019) urges the government to "develop and invest in the wider workforce to develop a workforce that is able to respond at the earliest possible opportunity to address effectively the complex and multifaceted issues, which cannot be the responsibility of statutory services alone". Other recommendations made in this paper include greater investment in the early years workforce and leadership development being more readily available for all aspirant and serving directors of children's services.

15.2 Workforce data

DfE reports that there were 30,720 children and family social workers⁹ (excluding agency workers) at 30 September 2019, an increase of 7.8% from 28,500 two years ago. Of these, 53.5% were case-holders at the time of the data collection compared to 51% two years ago. 5,754 agency workers were also working as children and family social workers at 30 September 2019, 77% of whom were covering vacancies. The proportion of agency workers overall in England has remained stable (15.8%) but in individual authorities the range is from 0% to 48.6%. In 2018/19 compared to two years ago, there was a 1.4 percentage point increase in staff turnover (15.1%) but a 0.5 percentage point reduction in vacancy rates, to 16.4%. (DfE, 2020).

It is important to note that there are variations between local authorities and not every authority has an increase in social work staff. Additionally, these national DfE data offer a snapshot only, on 30th September, and do not reflect a local authority position at other times of the year.

Information about the sufficiency, profile, skills and turnover in early help and the wider children's services workforce is not available. Indeed, little is known about the early help workforce.

15.3 Changes in the social care workforce

A resounding comment from respondents to this research was how much value they place on their workforce and the impact that their staff have generally on improving children and family outcomes, but especially in 2020. Many respondents were effusive in seeing staff as their enablers and their greatest asset. Terms such as strong, effective, dedicated, resilient, passionate and committed to improving life chances of children and who can adapt their practice and respond to changing demands, were frequently used.

"it's been really hard and one of the biggest challenges, frankly, has been about keeping people motivated and buoyant because you know, all you've got is your people, and if you lose your people then you are lost, and therefore your children lost." - *South West LA*

Respondents report that recruitment and retention of experienced social workers continues to be a key challenge, more so for some authorities than others, which report having a more

⁹ Full Time Equivalent

stable workforce than previously. The impact of property prices in an area; proximity to London without the incentive of London Weighting on salaries; the impact of negative Ofsted inspections on a local authority and its neighbours; and for some coastal authorities, a sense of being 'at the end of the line and hard to commute to' all play a part.

Strategies to boost recruitment and retention of experienced and skilled workers are in place and were reported to have resulted in reduced reliance on agency staff.

- 'Growing our own'. There was evidence of investment and growth in ASYE programmes and an increase in the number of ASYEs that local authorities will take on. In isolated cases, respondents report that following the completion of their ASYE year, some social workers leave the local authority to become agency social workers, thus the local authority is not reaping the benefits of the investment in those individuals
- Improved links and use of learning organisations, such as the West Midlands Teaching Partnership, local universities
- National programmes such as Step up, Return to social work, Frontline and the social work apprenticeship programme
- More respondents than previously are investing in development programmes and career pathways which support all social workers from ASYE level through to, for example Consultant/Senior/Advanced Social Worker and Practice Educator. This has created a culture of support and opportunity, improving practice, retention of experienced social workers and aided succession planning.

The workforce itself is changing. Examples of innovation and change responses include:

- Developing specialist roles such as a Therapeutic Social Worker within the Looked After Children Offer, and the role of Children's Mental Health Practitioner across the wider offer
- Robust triage with early help staff at the front door, or joint working between social work and early help staff, including edge of care teams, ensures where support can be offered through early help services it is directed appropriately and in a timely way
- Developing multi-disciplinary teams, significantly around complex safeguarding or transitional safeguarding. One respondent spoke of a new team which is funded through additional investment into children social care and adult social care, Public Health (via substance misuse service) and community development service, which aims to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to address the impact of adult disadvantage and risk on the care and protection of their children

- Closer working in, and with schools by social work and/or early help practitioners, funded by the local authority or the What Works Centre funded Social Workers in Schools initiative.

Agency staffing has come 'off the list of top three pressures' for some respondents. This is due in part to the conversion of agency staff into permanent staff following new IR35 regulations, as well as the recruitment and retention strategies described above. One authority described its policy not to use agency staff at all, but to over-recruit social workers. Finding experienced agency social workers was reported to have become more problematic during the Covid-19 pandemic.

16 Finance

The impact of budget constraints and future funding uncertainty on local authority children's services cannot be under-estimated. How children's services structure themselves, and scrutinise resources, workforce and services to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people with increasing complexity, is challenging. Local authorities have for a long time reviewed, restructured, rationalised and realised more effective ways of doing things. A number of interviewees talked about the significant amount of time that is spent in their DCS role closely managing budgets and expectations. Respondents report the immense value they place on their elected members and council leadership teams working together with them to manage and shape funding for children's service as effectively as possible.

16.1 Funding for early help and services for vulnerable children

Changes in spend on services for vulnerable children and their families, including early help, varies across the country. 44% of respondents reported a decrease in funding, and those who quantified the reductions did so as being between 15% and 30%. Reduction in the Public Health Grant was cited as one of the reasons for this. 33% of respondents experienced no change in funding, partly due to the continuation of Troubled Families Grant. 24% had seen investment in their early help services. The latter was reported to be investment by the council in new models to provide services for vulnerable children such as family group conferencing, edge of care services, multi-disciplinary teams, domestic abuse service, adolescent support units, work with parents/carers, and specialist workers. However, the Child Welfare Inequalities Project App highlights an overall reduction in early help spend per head from £483.62 in 2011 to £228.82 in 2019 (CWIP, 2020).

“Austerity and rising need will challenge services and potentially push greater introspection, separation and disinvestment in early intervention at a time when this must be our focus.” -
South West LA

16.2 Grant funding

16.2.1 Troubled Families

The Troubled Families annual report 2019/20 (MHCLG, 2020c) said that successful family outcomes numbered around 350,000 by 5th April 2020 and the programme was having a positive impact on outcomes. £265m to extend the programme to 2021/22 was announced in the Spending Review in November 2020.

All respondents agreed that Troubled Families Programme has significantly supported the delivery of early help in local authorities. Respondents were clear that any reduction or withdrawal of this funding, which is now due to cease in March 2022 after the further year’s extension, would decimate their early help offers. Some of their views are provided in the wordle to the right. The uncertainty about the funding, although MHCLG has said they expect something to replace it, has resulted in staff moving on as there is no clear job security.



Figure 83: Respondents view on the impact of the Troubled Families programme and it ceasing

16.2.2 Other grants

Approximately 80% of 71 respondents were in receipt of at least one additional grant other than those available to all local authorities. This additional investment, for specific purposes, varies in size and duration but is generally achieved through bidding for ring-fenced, short term pots of money. Whilst these grants are valued when received, respondents pointed out the inequity of awarding grant funding through bidding processes, some feeling very keenly that the resources required to submit a bid were significant and may well be unsuccessful.

This short-termist approach to children’s services funding is unsustainable and destabilises the ability to plan and sustain services in the medium to long term.

The table below illustrates the volume of grants or funding sources that local authorities reported to us that they are accessing. This list may not be exhaustive.

ALL LOCAL AUTHORITIES		
UASC (Home Office)	Troubled Families Grant (MHCLG)	Staying Close (DfE)
UASC Leaving Care (Home Office)	Pupil Premium (Education & Skills Funding Agency)	Care Leavers Extended Personal Adviser Duty (DFE)
Staying Put Grant (DfE)	Public Health Grant	Building Bridges (DfE)
Rough Sleepers Grant (DfE)	Adoption Support Grant (DfE)	
Youth Justice Grant (Youth Justice Board)	LASPO Remand Allocations (Youth Justice Board)	
SELECTED LOCAL AUTHORITIES (OFTEN THROUGH A BID PROCESS)		
LA Improvement Programmes and Partners in Practice (DfE)	Strengthening Families – no wrong door (DfE)	ASYE Grant – Skills for Care
What Works Centre projects (DfE)	Partners in Practice (DfE)	Healthy Lifestyles – Public Health Grant
Mockingbird (DfE/ESFA)	Innovation Funding and Understanding Excellence (DfE)	Lottery Funding
NHS Mental Health in schools	Remand Grant – Youth Custody Service	Social Care support grant
Special Guardianship (DfE/ESFA)	Step up to Social Work Programme (DfE)	MOPAC grants (London only)
NAAS Wider Phase 2 Grant, (DfE/ESFA)	Extension of the Role of Virtual School (DfE)	Trusted Relationships Grant (Home Office)
Greater Manchester Innovation Funding	Strengthening Families Protecting Children (DfE)	LAC Mental Health Project (DFE)
Music Hub, Arts Council	Spacehive (DCLG)	Social Impact Bonds
Arts Service Grant, Arts Council	Social Care support grant	European social funding
Young Londoners Fund	Youth endowment fund	

Figure 84: Examples of the grants that some responding local authorities are accessing

16.3 Children’s services budget

75 respondents had increased their children’s services budgets in the past two years. The reasons have been twofold:

- Needs-led growth: where actual or predicted overspends are ‘covered’ in-year in recognition of increasing expenditure on statutory social work to meet growth in demand. This funding growth is not always at the rate of increased demand
- Capital and transformation investment in children’s services aimed at reducing pressures, demand and therefore prevent future overspends. Invest to save.

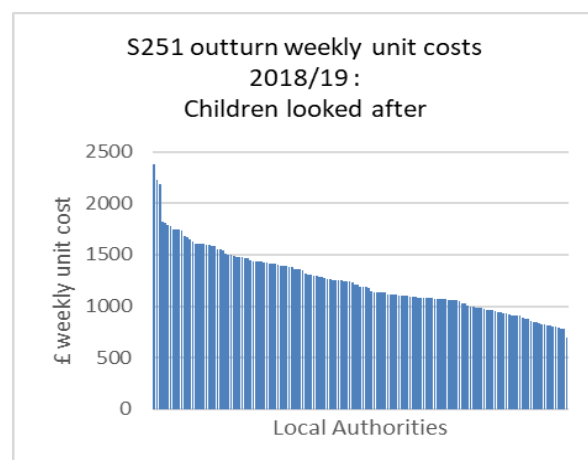
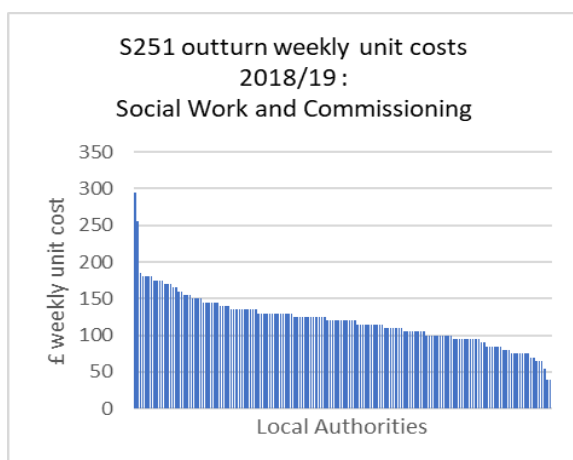
Children's services funding appears to have been protected by councils over the past two years. Respondents highlight however, the risk to the sustainability of that relative protection given the pressures evidenced and forecast here. These financial pressures are felt across the system, and perhaps most acutely in the High Needs Block.

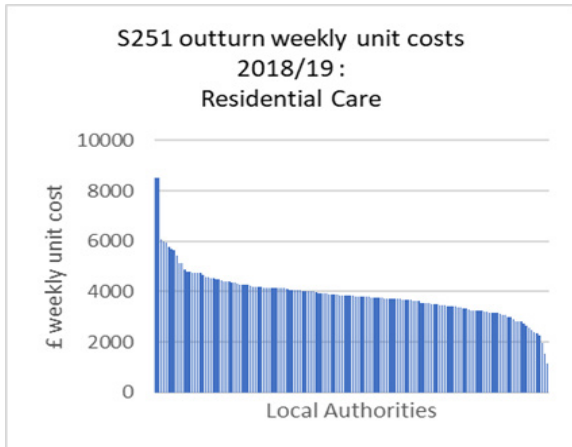
56% of respondents reported an increase in their budget, either needs-led growth or for capital and transformation investment, but in some instances the increased demand and placement costs outstripped even the additional funding, resulting in overspends anyway. 36% of respondents provided information about additional funding required as a result of increased placement costs. Where investment for transformation had been provided, there was recognition that the change needed to achieve the required long term savings takes time. However, it is evident from individual local authority data that over the past two years, this is beginning to show impact for some authorities with reduced referrals, and/or child protection plans and fewer children looked after.

Respondents found that the costs of unplanned or one-off events, for example cyber attack, local government reorganisation, an Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate', expensive secure units or tier 4 mental health placements, and of course the Covid-19 pandemic, puts at risk the local authority's ability to set a balanced budget. Setting a balanced budget is a legal requirement upon all local authorities in England.

16.4 Financial data

Budgets and unit costs vary between authorities. The charts below show the weekly unit costs for social work and commissioning, children looked after, in-house fostering, and residential placements calculated from local authorities' Section 251 financial return and activity data.





Figures 85, 86, 87: Approximate weekly costs for social work and commissioning, children looked after and residential care. DfE calculations from S251 return and relevant number of children. Source: DfE LAIT tool based on latest available analysis (2018/19)

The chart below shows increase in expenditure on the budget lines in the Section 251 financial return. The total spend of children looked after has increased by 8% to £5.3 billion in 2019/20. The reduction in spending on children’s centres and other spend on children under 5, and services for young people can also be clearly seen.

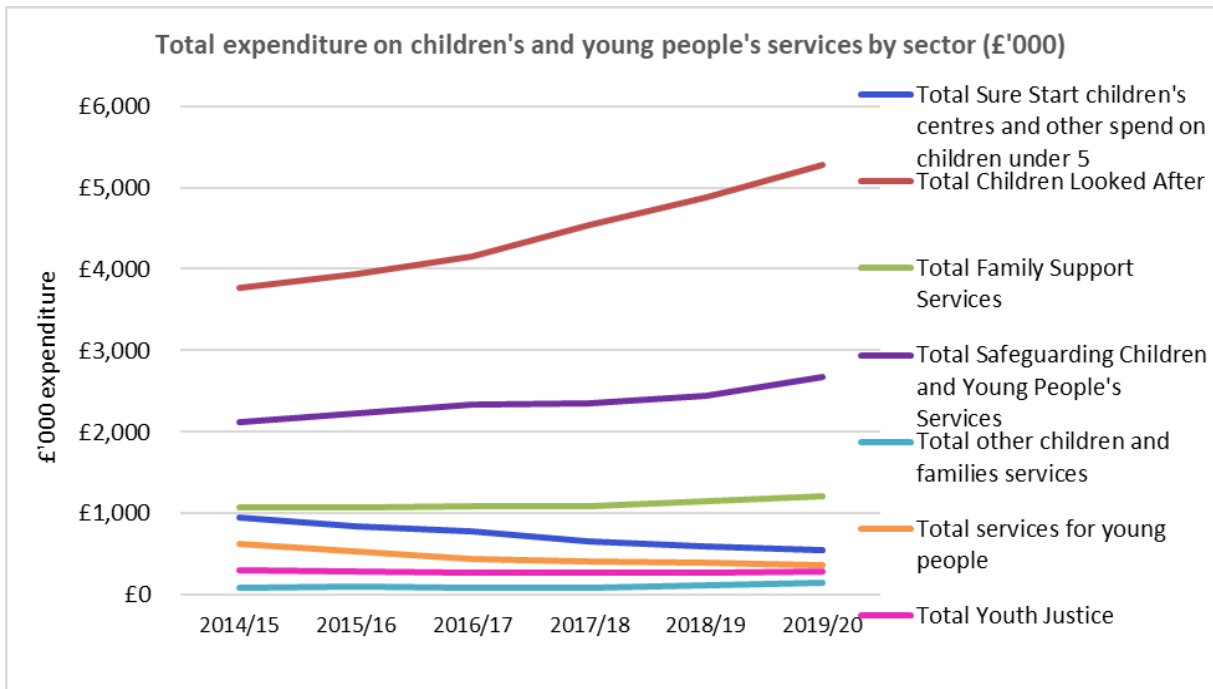


Figure 88: Total expenditure on children’s and young people’s services.

16.5 Council and children’s services funding pressures

The top four current funding pressures cited by local authorities have changed since phase 6 and reflect pressures that are largely outside the direct control of local authorities. Some authorities gave examples of proactive managing and influencing to relieve and mitigate where possible:

1. Placement costs for children looked after, specifically independent fostering agencies, independent residential and secure placements (Section 11)
2. Increase in demand and complexity of presenting needs (Section 14)
3. SEND and High Needs Block, including transport. Whilst this is not central to Safeguarding Pressures research, this continues to be one of the top three and growing pressures for children's services (Section 14)
4. Inequity in funding such as bidding for small one-off pots of grant funding, 1-year Spending Review, lack of ring-fenced funding for early help (Section 16).

In Phase 1 of this research (2010), overspends due to increased safeguarding demand were between 6% and 8%. In phase 6 (2018), 83 local authorities estimated shortfalls of an average of 10.4% in their children's services budget, requiring £410.8million to close any budget gap in 2018/19. This equated to an additional £840million in-year simply to 'steady the ship' in March 2018. Many authorities highlighted that budgets would require incremental growth if demand further increased and to account for any further cost increases beyond 2018.

Two years later, in September 2020, 63 respondents reported a total shortfall of £349.3m, an average of 9.1%. Only five authorities projected no overspend and only one reported a projected underspend. Extrapolated to all 151 local authorities, the total required now to close the budget gap in-year is £824.1m to 'stay still'. Planned expenditure for 2020/21 is not known as the DfE withdrew this statutory data collection to ease the burden on LAs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Examples demonstrating the variation in investment, savings, and projections in the respondent's own words, are provided below:

<p>There was no change to the budget in 2018/19 and this resulted in a £6.5m overspend within children's social care due to growth. As part of a children's strategy in 2019/20 the LA increased the CSC budget by an additional £6.2m, the final position for 2019/20 was a £2.4m overspend</p>	<p>We identified and achieved savings resulting in a small budget reduction. This was achieved mainly by reducing the use of agency social workers and fewer children in our care</p>	<p>We have still needed to deliver savings and efficiencies in spite of being inadequate with close scrutiny from DfE, the appointed commissioner and improvement board</p>
<p>£4.5m savings target attached to the transformation programme, of which £1.4m was achieved through restructuring by bringing together CSS & EH services. The remainder is linked to increasing the number of in-house foster carers & reducing the number of agency & demand increases for CSW. Extra one-off investment of £5m to pump prime these initiatives. Savings have not yet been achieved and expected to be delivered in future years (partly due to delays resulting from COVID)"</p>	<p>The net managed budget for C&F Directorate has increased by £0.8m (2018-19 to 2020-21). Gross Expenditure has increased by £33m from £286m to £319m. For 20/21, there is a current in-year pressure of £8.2m mainly impacted by COVID-19. Linked with a reduction in demand for statutory services there are associated savings and budget reductions in place. We also have an ambitious plan to increase in-house capacity to care for our looked after children in borough-based placements</p>	<p>The impact has been significant. The Council MTFP is showing a budget gap of £22m over the two years period and all the services in the Council including children's services have savings target to deliver to balance the gap. On the top of that, Children's services are also working to deliver a deficit recovery plan to reduce the overspend in Placements and Staffing costs. Additional budget has been allocated to the Children's services over the years with the anticipation that deficit recovery plan will reduce the spend</p>
<p>We are currently predicting a balanced budget for 2020/21 however pressures are emerging for the 2021/22 budget that will require imagination and realignment of services to meet demand. We continue to invest in services that will result in medium to longer term savings. The High needs block remains very significantly over-spent and despite a robust DfE endorsed recovery plan is projected to remain in substantial deficit - primarily driven by EHCP and specialist education placement numbers</p>	<p>The indicative overspend on Children's Services is between £9m and £11m for 2020-21, representing around 9% of allocated budget. Placement costs have increased sharply since March 2020 and there are concerns that whilst this maybe Covid related, placement costs will not cease at the end of the pandemic in the way other cost pressures might. In addition, this represents only a part year effect and therefore the impact on the 2021-22 budget could be as high as £15m already and potentially increasing further as pressures mount for both discharges from placements and children requiring placements to keep them safe</p>	<p>Current funding levels are unsustainable to meet the rising tide of increased demand and pressures on Children's Services. £10m would address the pressures this year but should be supplemented by a further £10m for investment in the workforce and in early intervention funding ahead of rising demand for children's services in response to Covid, mental health issues and poverty impacting on children and families. The MTFP for 2021-22 to 2025-26 includes demand and demography pressures of £3.1m per annum relating to CLA and Transport. Further pressures around EHCP looking at 20% increase pa over the MTFP. Also impact of COVID-19 on trading with school and early years centres. Impact unknown but for early years centres there is an income budget of £4.6m</p>

16.6 Future funding

Councils are facing significant budget deficits stemming from simultaneously increased spending and reduced income as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The wider economic effects of the pandemic are impacting on councils' income sources to different extents as income generation through leisure and tourism, households and businesses diminishes. In October 2020, one authority cited a loss of Airport Dividends, a critical income stream, in the region of £50m.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies calculated a £7.2billion deficit in council budgets in 2020/21 (IFS, 2020), which will certainly be significantly higher at the time of publishing this report in February 2021. Local Government Covid-19 Support Packages are, however, in place to ameliorate the impact of councils' additional expenditure, and loss of income.

75 authorities provided information about budget changes in children's social care and early help in the next two years and their impact. 71% of respondents felt that resources are exhausted following relentless increased demand, costs and savings targets. There continues to be a requirement on many children's services departments to make savings, ranging from 3% to 20% of their annual budgets.

17% of respondents stated that future funding needs are difficult to anticipate. There is currently a great deal of uncertainty and instability surrounding the future funding settlements following the one-year Spending Review in November 2020, the continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic and impact that will have, together with existing and exacerbated pressures in the system.

Those respondents who are currently implementing new ways of working, such as No Wrong Door and Family Safeguarding models, are hopeful that once embedded, they will see improved outcomes for children and families, reduced demand and costs, and start to bridge the funding gap, as has been evidenced in a number of authorities where these approaches have been introduced. There is a sense, however, that unless we can meet the needs of children and families earlier, children's services will continue to face a cycle of funded overspends in order to maintain essential services for children and their families.

"I am having to wave my 'Director of Children's Social Care, that level of reduction is unsafe' flag. I'm very fortunate that council leaders get it, the implication for the Council is if they were to not take that money from me, we would cease to provide many of the other services that the Council has to provide. I'm fighting the position for children, not on what's good for them, not on what would make it even better, not what would be the improvement agenda even though we've done a fabulous job over the last three years. Simply, if I don't get the money, I can't keep them safe". – *South East LA*

17 Summary of Factors, Challenges and Enablers

17.1 Summary of factors

Throughout this research report, we have provided evidence from a range of sources and narrative from local authorities about the factors behind activity in early help and social care, and how approaches are being taken to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and their families. Consideration of the drivers behind these presenting factors, and the effects that they have on children and young people now, and into adulthood, needs to frame our thinking.

We have evidenced that an increasing number of children and families require support from early help and social care due to factors that could be ameliorated at an earlier stage. There is significant research about the impact of these on the lived experiences and readiness of our children and young people for adulthood. These factors are summarised in the table below.

	CAUSES AND DRIVERS	PRESENTING NEEDS	EFFECTS
SOCIAL FACTORS: changes to the underlying needs faced by the local community and parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population increase • Unemployment/ in-secure work • Poverty • Social media expectations and cyber-bullying • Lack of affordable house • Homelessness Act • Welfare reforms • Lack of support networks • Organised crime and exploitation • Adverse childhood experiences • Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater demand for support from early help, social care, youth justice and other services. • Homelessness, eviction, housing issues • Migration from high cost urban areas to other LAs • Domestic abuse • Parental mental health • Parental drug and alcohol abuse • Child’s mental health • Behaviour • Greater complexity in the system • Neglect • Social isolation • Revolving door and episodic need for support from services • Delays • Poor attainment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor health • Social isolation • Poor employment prospects • Poor mental health • Suicide and self-harm • Unhealthy relationships.
SYSTEM AND PRACTICE FACTORS: the way that the system of services responds to families requiring help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of family court judges and delays in care proceedings • Information sharing and systems • Some services not available • Waiting lists for support or interventions • How effectively partners work together • Thresholds. 		
INFRASTRUCTURE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term funding • Effectiveness of commissioning • Government legislation, policy and funding. 		

Figure 89: Summary of factors, causes and effects. Notes: Those in pink are more specific to the Covid-19 pandemic. Presenting issues are likely to be as a result of more than one factor.

17.2 Challenges and enablers

The prevalence of interlocking factors, challenges and enablers are present in differing combinations across the country. The case studies demonstrate challenges that are unique, but significant, to a few authorities only. Universally, the sector continues to face challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic and response to it, but respondents were also able to recognise some enablers arising, which will impact positively on the future delivery of services.

CHALLENGES	ENABLERS
<p>1. Common cost pressures for all local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding and future funding uncertainty (one year budget and grants ceasing) • Expenditure on High Needs Block/SEND • Price and wage inflation • Austerity and economic downturn, including Council loss of income • Broken care market and cost of placements • Increasing demand. <p>2. Common drivers of demand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population changes • Increase in poverty • Homelessness, housing cost/availability • Risks associated with serious youth crime and contextual safeguarding • Increase in complexity of need • Growth in mental ill-health and access to effective mental health services • Shortage of suitable placements, secure and tier 4 mental health beds in particular • Continued increase in domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse • Family Justice System, delays and decisions made in care proceedings. <p>3. System factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention of early help services • Reduced availability of workforce due to Covid-19 pandemic • Workforce emotional health and wellbeing, leaving the profession • Brexit • Capacity to take forward improvement work at the required pace • Delays in court hearings • Recruitment and retention - shortage of experienced social workers • Placement capacity (including foster carer and adopter recruitment) • Reducing capacity coupled with increased pressures in partner agencies (particularly police and health). 	<p>1. Common financial enablers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Troubled Families Grant. Public Health Grant • Council commitment to increase/maintain children's services budget. <p>2. Enablers for services to vulnerable children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better identification of risk (e.g. CCE, trafficking) • Developing community assets and finding community solutions • Focus on evidence-based programmes • Different ways of working, transformation programmes – e.g. strengths- based approaches, such as restorative practice, signs of safety and motivational interviewing. <p>3. System factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making use of technology including virtual meetings • Strong partnership working, especially with schools • Councils and councillors commitment to children's services • Strong and stable leadership in children's services • Strong, effective and dedicated workforce • Co-development of services with children and families • Greater mobilisation of the third sector • Stronger safeguarding partnerships • Sector led improvement and joint working across local areas • Committed workforce and building a stable workforce through programmes such as social work apprenticeships • Investment in effective early help and earlier targeted intervention, and interface between early help and social care.

4. Local authority specific factors

- Geography – challenges for rural and coastal populations
- Local government reorganisation
- Becoming a children’s trust
- Isolated issues (IT outages)
- Multiple agencies in the local area, e.g. district councils, CCGs, combined authority (proliferation of fragmented organisational infrastructures)
- Increase in UASC.

Figure 90: Summary of challenges and enablers

The application of new models and cultures of service organisation and delivery, which are either shared with other authorities or in individual authorities were cited as enablers of change. Since 2015 there has been a significant focus from the DfE on identifying and evaluating innovative approaches to children’s social care and early help. A number of such innovative services have been found through evaluation to be effective at reducing demand at various stages in the social care process (Fitzsimmons et al, 2020) and (Sebba et al, 2017). Those programmes found to be effective have been adopted by increasing numbers of local authorities in an attempt to spread the good practice, and to reduce demand across the sector.

By looking at current data and trends over time in individual authorities, it is clear that there have been significant reductions in one or more of children in need, on child protection plans and children looked after in some authorities that were the developers or very early adopters of, some of these programmes.

This suggests that these innovations, in these contexts, may have had a beneficial effect on levels of demand over a longer period than was measured in the initial evaluation. However, it is possible that it is not wholly the innovations themselves that have led to this change, but rather the funding attached to these innovations, as well as the wider characteristics of the local authority. As such, this research does not attempt to draw any conclusions about the reasons for reductions in demand in some authorities and not others.

In the DfE Omnibus Survey (DfE, 2020c), authorities were asked what has helped to improve social care services in their authority area. ‘Senior local authority leadership’ (94%); ‘correctly identifying key areas of development’ (90%); ‘retention of high-quality staff’ (80%); and ‘local political leadership’ (77%) were the four enablers cited most often.

Other enablers included use of data and quality assurance mechanisms; recruitment of high-quality staff; implementing new practice frameworks; close multi-agency partnership working; learning from other local authorities (sector-led improvement); a greater commitment to improving the quality of practice; outcome based financial planning; and, staff loyalty and goodwill.

The wealth of evidence gathered as part of this research points to a range of contexts nationally and locally where the relationship between drivers of demand and generating sustainable change is not always achievable. Where planned improvement and investment would likely provide demonstrable outcomes in a 'steady state', the disordered and often chaotic landscape of increased demand, the Covid-19 pandemic, placement pressures etc, introduce a number of often unforeseen variables that impact negatively. These 'shifting sands' and changing operative context must be considered when evaluating success.

18 Case Studies

Three local authorities volunteered to provide greater detail and test out hypotheses throughout the research. Their case studies on the following pages provide a summary of individual authority perspectives and illustrate the diversity between local areas.

DORSET

ABOUT THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Dorset Council is a new unitary authority and legal entity following local government reorganisation in April 2019. This included removal of Christchurch area and district councils. 67,868 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in the local area, an increase of 1% in the last five years and is not forecast to change by 2025. Approximately 12.2% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years old are living in low income families, and an index of multiple deprivation 2018 ranks Dorset of 120th out of 152 LAs, (1 being the most deprived). There are a total of 184 schools.

ORGANISATION AND MODELS OF PRACTICE

Last Ofsted inspection: Focused Visit October 2019

A children's services transformation programme, commenced at the start of 2020, has continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure pace of improvement was maintained, and stability for staff at the end of the pandemic, some of whom are part of an international social work recruitment campaign. The new Dorset Children Thrive model, implemented in September 2020 has brought together SEND, inclusion, early help and social work staff in localities around school clusters; implementing a culture to better support relationship, strength-based practice through motivational interviewing and, other tools. A single access point for assessment including an Early Help Hub is starting to provide more effective pathways for support, which families have already started to feedback positively about.

A conversation based front door (based on Professor Thorpe model), and changes to handling of Police public protection notices to twice daily dialogue mean that where no safeguarding concerns are identified, PPNs go to early help which has reduced police contacts to social care by 45% whilst maintaining safe practice.

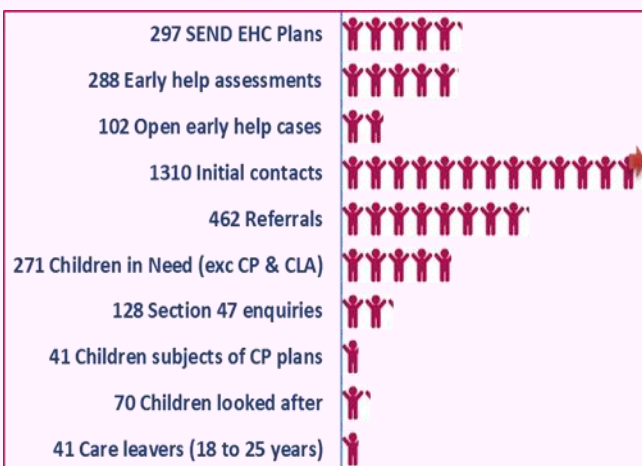
The Harbour, inspired by North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door model, is currently being implemented in a new building in Weymouth where there are more adolescents in Dorset, in addition to conversion of buildings to semi-independent living for care leavers.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

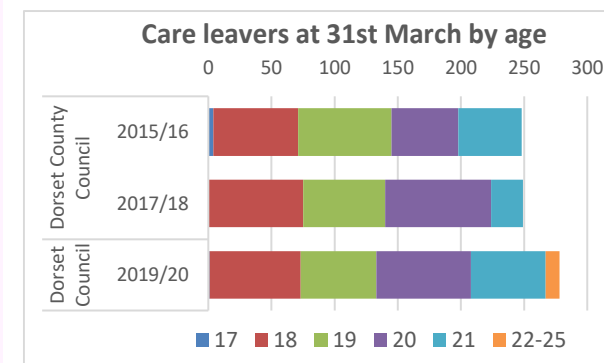
	2020/21 (£)	2021/22 (£)
Total Budget:	73,953,558	76,640,712
Including Savings of:	(1,600,000)	(4,879,300)
Budget excluding savings	75,553,558	81,520,011
% savings	2.2%	5.9%

- Grant for No Wrong Door, no other children's services grants received, transformation programme funded by Dorset Council
- Investment in early help
- Trouble Families Grant – 100% of PBR achieved.

FOR EVERY 10,000 CHILDREN THERE ARE...



CARE LEAVERS



Availability of suitable, affordable accommodation impacting on stability for care leavers.

CHALLENGES AND ENABLERS

CHALLENGES

There will be pressures driving demand for all services to vulnerable children and cost which are common to all LAs. Those below are significant to this authority.

- Delays in the youth justice and Courts system
- Provision of good quality, cost effective placements
- Focus on local government reorganisation over a long period, actual separation of a part of Dorset and districts which placed pressure on undertaking 'business as usual'.

Covid-19 specific

- Health visitors not visiting initially during Covid-19 which was resolved over time
- Delays in assessment and therapies affecting children with SEND
- Access to short breaks was a challenge and there were difficulties for some in using direct payments.

ENABLERS

- Smaller 0-17 population
- Implementation of locality working and wrap around services
- Strong leadership with a focus on co-production and collaboration
- Enhanced partnership working
- Availability of former district council buildings to transform for residential provision and The Harbour (inspired by No Wrong Door) and care leaver accommodation
- Staff motivation and engagement during 2020, and good communication.

Covid-19 specific

- Covid-19 response joint working with schools further strengthened, working in partnership with schools through clusters.
- Community response to supporting families in financial hardship
- Creative use of resources to put on additional activities for families in the summer.

'MAKING A DIFFERENCE' EXAMPLE

In response to school closures we created and implemented a new system to track attendance of and risk of vulnerable children. The list of children was brought together based on the DfE definition of vulnerable children, in addition as an authority we chose to monitor all children with a Dorset postcode.

A regular meeting of school cluster leads and link workers enabled us to communicate with schools and collect attendance and risk judgement data from schools on a weekly basis. This enabled early intervention where issues were identified (such as low attendance of key cohorts).

Progress across the County was shared back with schools at periodic intervals via the Cluster Lead meetings and a live online portal. We also developed links with out of county schools and had internal Council departments link with different settings to collect weekly attendance and risk data.

Dorset were asked to be one of three Local Authorities to provide an update to the Troubled Families National Local Authority Webinar in April 2020 organised by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government in recognition of our efforts to encourage attendance of vulnerable children and young people back to school. Focus was around the collection and use of attendance and risk data.

LOCAL AUTHORITY QUOTES

"We were amid a transformation programme and restructure, going through consultation with staff at the outbreak of Covid-19. After much deliberation we cracked on with it, and I'm glad we did. There was some really positive feedback from families very early on. So even though it was a stressful process going through the change, I think that actually helped teams to know that it was done for the right reasons."

HORIZON SCANNING

- Reduction in looked after children, child protection plans as a result of improved appropriate planning and increase in early help and permanence planning, but dependent on families needing statutory support through increased needs
- Improve practice in Dorset through the transformation programme
- Better availability and quality of accommodation for care leavers.

REDCAR & CLEVELAND

ABOUT THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Redcar & Cleveland is a small coastal authority in the North East. 27,608 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in the local area. Approximately 25.6% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years old are living in low income families, and the index of multiple deprivation 2019 rank is 29 out of 152 LAs, with large variation within the LA. The area has seen a rapid decline in heavy industry in recent years, particularly the closure of the local steel works. There is a strong sense of community, especially in rural areas of the authority. There are a total of 59 schools. The Council has a Managing Director model.

ORGANISATION AND MODELS OF PRACTICE

Last Ofsted inspection: Requires improvement to be good (April 2017)

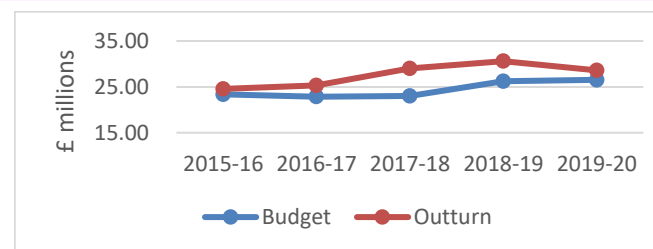
Redcar & Cleveland is committed to keeping children safely at home wherever possible with their family and networks. Consequently, Signs of Safety was implemented as a practice framework across early help, social care and partners in 2018. A multi-agency children's hub was launched in June 2019. The authority also uses Family Group Conferencing, and an Edge of Care team has been created.

The implementation of the No Wrong Door approach has commenced to provide an additional platform for child centred strength-based practice.

A recent directorate restructure has brought early help and social care together to enable a more seamless approach.











Improvements in fostering provision have shifted the ratio of in-house to IFA foster care placements from 40-60 to 60-40 which has increased choice and reduced cost. As the LA has no LA owned residential homes, all residential care is commissioned.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION



Revenue budgets have increased over the period and re-aligned throughout the service following a reduction of approx. £1.4m in early help in 2018/19. There are current pressures relating to a recent cyber-attack and the impact of Covid, plus increased demand and meeting more complex needs.

FOR EVERY 10,000 CHILDREN THERE ARE...

322 SEND EHC Plans	
88 Early help assessments	
267 Open early help cases	
3469 Initial contacts	
764 Referrals	
383 Children in Need (exc CP & CLA)	
354 Section 47 enquiries	
94 Children subjects of CP plans	
126 Children looked after	
33 Care leavers (18 to 25 years)	

CARE LEAVERS

Age:	17	18	19	20	21	22-25	TOTAL
2016/17	4	19	14	18	13	n/a	68
2017/18	1	23	19	14	18	n/a	75
2018/19	1	29	23	19	14	n/a	86
2019/20		24	30	23	19	21	117

There were 17 UASC care leavers at the end of 19/20 and currently four with NRPF who are unable to travel due to Covid restrictions. The number of 21-25 year-olds who receive support from their Personal Advisor has increased creating additional service pressures. A number of care leavers had made the decision to leave the leaving care service in the last twelve months but have subsequently contacted their previous Advisor for ongoing advice and support adding further pressure.

CHALLENGES AND ENABLERS

CHALLENGES

There will be pressures driving demand for all services to vulnerable children and cost which are common to all LAs. Those below are significant to this authority.

- Rising complexity of issues, including criminal exploitation, facing children and young people and pressure on available resources and capacity to address this
- High prevalence of domestic abuse and parental mental health issues
- Recruiting experienced social workers, including agency staff
- Insufficient regulated placement options to meet the individual needs of young people, particularly those with complex needs
- Increased costs of placements, often due to increased demand for therapeutic support
- Impact of cyber-attack of February 2020
- SEND: Significant High Needs Block funding deficit and increase in EHCPs in the last two years.

ENABLERS

- Council and political commitment to children's services: increased investment, strong interest and scrutiny
- Strong regional support networks and joint working arrangements
- Strong and effective partnership working
- Resilient staff committed to meeting challenges and demands and doing the best for children and families
- Strong early help offer using family hubs and youth centres to support safeguarding
- Commitment to a consistent and quality application of the practice framework
- Culture of learning and innovation.

'MAKING A DIFFERENCE' EXAMPLE

Recruitment of in-house foster carers

Due to the rise in the number of children in our care and over reliance on costly independent fostering placements the service implemented a Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy. It clearly sets out how the Council would ensure that our foster carers are rewarded and supported to continue their caring role for as long as possible. The strategy was produced by a working group involving cross party representation of Elected Members, staff representing Children's Social Care, Communications and Service Improvement. The strategy considered findings from national research into foster carer recruitment and retention as well as research and benchmarking of other authorities in the region and independent agencies.

The campaign regularly featured in Council and community magazines and a microsite was also created featuring filmed case studies where carers talked about the rewards of fostering. Further awareness was raised throughout the Borough using banners around the town and the campaign logo on Council vehicles. The profile of fostering in Redcar received a further boost when two foster carers were successfully nominated for MBEs. The achievement featured strongly in the recruitment campaign.

Alongside the campaign, allowances, fees and financial rewards were reviewed to ensure competitiveness and a new incentive was provided in the form of council tax exemption for carers up to Band B.

The result of the campaign was a significant decrease in average placement costs between in-house and IFA of 45%, however due to the increase in supervision, training and assessment the saving is reduced to 30% per place.

LOCAL AUTHORITY QUOTES

"In terms of the demand, we should impact positively through the way that we now operate and work in our system, but that's going to be counteracted by the trajectory we've got of increased need. It's going to be really difficult, despite predicting, which we are pretty good at. So I say "we are going to £X investment", but what tends to happen is you get the investment and by the time you've managed to recruit, demand has exceeded so you're just playing catch up all the time".

HORIZON SCANNING

- Continued increase in number of families living in poverty in the area and associated risks and vulnerabilities that this brings
- Impact of Covid on the mental health of children and their parents
- Demand is projected to reduce as a result of improvements, however the increase in need and complexity will impact resources
- No Wrong Door and in-house provision
- National shortages of, and difficulties recruiting qualified and experienced social workers.

ROCHDALE

ABOUT THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Rochdale is one of the ten authorities in Greater Manchester and part of the GM combined authority. 53,299 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in the local area, an increase of 5% in the last five years and forecast to increase further. Approximately 30% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years old are living in low income families and the index of multiple deprivation 2018 ranks Rochdale 14th highest out of 152 LAs. There are a total of 95 schools.

ORGANISATION AND MODELS OF PRACTICE

Last Ofsted inspection (January 2018): Requires Improvement to be Good.

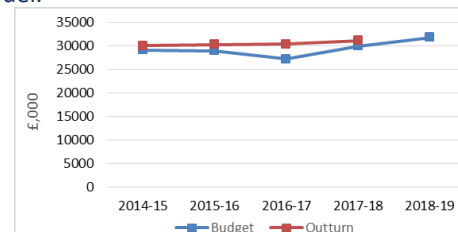
Our Multi-Agency Relationship Manifesto supports a whole systems approach across the local area. The Family Services Model galvanises the partnership to provide strong early intervention and support for children and families in their local community. As part of this model, we have an early help and safeguarding hub 'front door' (EHASH) with social workers, health and police officers working together to ensure children and families receive the right service, at the right time, in the right way.

Our model of relational practice has supported the development of innovative practice. This includes our bespoke team to support parents who have had previous children removed through recurrent care proceedings (NEST); the extension of ACT (Achieving Change Together) to our Cared4Children Teams (we have used no welfare secure placements since 2016). We have implemented No Wrong Door as part of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme at the outset of the pandemic and implemented new parenting programmes such as Break4Change, which has made a demonstrable impact on reducing child to parent violence.

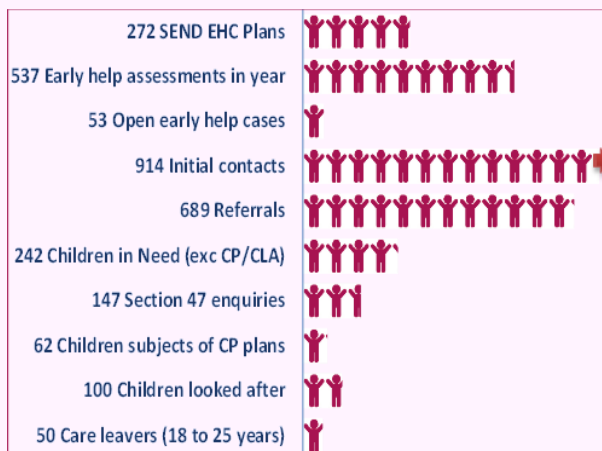
Project Fostering has driven radical changes to our fostering service, realising our best ever Fostering Fortnight. So far in 202/21, 17 foster carers have been approved and 22 are currently in assessment. We are implementing SecureBase, PACE and Mockingbird to ensure we have the right foster carers attuned to children's individual needs.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

In 2018/19 children's services overspent by £6.5m. The LA has since invested in a 5 year financial strategy for children's social care, this includes additional funding which tapers over the lifespan of the model as the numbers of children in care reduce and the innovation benefits are realised. The innovations include No Wrong Door, NEST and ACT as well as the established Family Services Model.



FOR EVERY 10,000 CHILDREN THERE ARE...



CARE LEAVERS

Age:	17	18	19	20	21	22-25	TOTAL
2015/16	2	49	43	45	27		166
2017/18		40	39	53	43	7	182
2019/20		58	41	40	39	86	264
UASC Care leavers at 31 March 2020:						No.	29
						%	11%

Rochdale is the first authority to put all elements of the Greater Manchester Care Leaver Offer in place. This includes, for example: free prescriptions; access to technology; accommodation support whilst at university; and making sure no care leaver is classed as intentionally homeless. Our approach is to constantly ask "would this be good enough for our child"; this is our benchmark in all that we do.

CHALLENGES AND ENABLERS

CHALLENGES

There will be pressures driving demand for all services to vulnerable children and cost which are common to all LAs. Those below are significant to this authority.

- Increase in external placements costs, predicting a further increase in unit costs as we have had to make some very costly placements in the residential sector due to supply issues
- Increase in organised crime, child criminal exploitation, honour-based violence and forced marriage in the past two years (potentially due to raised awareness)
- Increase in domestic abuse particularly during Covid-19, with twice as many referrals in autumn 2020 compared to the same period in 2019
- Transient community and many families move into the area due to low housing costs.

ENABLERS

- Integrated Commissioning Board and pooled budgets
- Strong and highly visible leadership and communication
- Principle-led practice which has strengthened resilience and whole service cohesion
- Joint multi-agency early help and social care front door (EHASH)
- Locality working and four locality hubs
- Strong relationships with partners and the courts
- Collaborative working with finance teams with permission to be creative
- Investment in quality assurance frameworks.

'MAKING A DIFFERENCE' EXAMPLE

From day 1 of the Covid-19 pandemic, our focus has been on doing the right thing by our children, families and our staff members; this has been our moral compass and guide.

This has supported us to steer our way through uncharted territory, with principle-led practice. Our mantra has been "despite Covid-19". We have delivered parenting groups virtually and developed three food clubs in children's centres during lockdown 1. We have built this up to be a food network of 30 sites and a food warehouse across the Borough, all making an impact on reducing food poverty. Strong partnership working is central to developing this with our Lead Member, now the Food Champion for Rochdale.

During the first hundred days of the pandemic the senior leadership team sent a daily briefing to staff members, keeping everyone up to date with Borough-wide issues, sharing examples of best practice, supporting staff to feel comfortable in virtual meetings (sharing funny stories of animals and children!) and sharing wellbeing initiatives such as mindfulness. Through the briefings we have recognised the acute distress of colleagues from the BAME community at the time of George Floyd's death; determined to make this a turning point, we jointly developed an action plan with the BAME focus group, part of which involves delivering anti-racist training for the whole children's workforce.

We have used every opportunity to see our vulnerable children. We delivered door-step Easter eggs and art packs, sent personalised cards to each care leaver to extend our reach to vulnerable young people, developed creative approaches to family time, with video diaries, recorded lullabies and skype discos and we are contributing examples of our creative practice to a book about relational practice with children and families.

LOCAL AUTHORITY QUOTES

Message to parents of school children during the Covid-19 pandemic has been:

"Our approach is to always try to do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time and to keep you informed."

Director of Children's Services

HORIZON SCANNING

- Longer term impact of Covid-19 on family functioning and economic pressures
- Expect continuing demand and increased referrals for children's safeguarding issues
- Need to plan how we will address the impact on vulnerable children whose lives have been significantly disrupted during the pandemic
- Managing financial Covid-19 pressures experienced by the council whilst sustaining services.

19 Direction of Travel

19.1 Direction of travel and future changes

Respondents were less certain about the direction of travel for children's services in the next two years than in previous phases of this research. Of the 99 respondents to this question, 48% predicted a general continued rise in demand, compared to 64% (109 respondents) two years ago. Fewer predicted a decrease in demand for services, but many were unable to commit to any specific predictions, prefacing their views by 'but it is difficult to say'.

Approximately 10% stated they expect to see a reduction in child protection plans and fewer children looked after, linked to interventions in place or underway to support achieving these outcomes. But there was a recognition that change takes time. There is now evidence of reducing demand in authorities which had implemented change programmes a few years ago, and those authorities with improvement programmes now, may not see the benefit for some time, depending on other factors that impact on their services, as we have illustrated earlier.

The longer term and lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on families remains to be seen, with respondents identifying 'latent need' that is yet unknown. Statistical predictions undertaken in previous phases of this research are no longer viable given this level of uncertainty.

"There will be key changes / longer term impact of Covid19 on family functioning and relationships and the impact of Covid19 related economic pressures brought about by increased worklessness and more people reliant on Universal Credit. The loss of schooling for more vulnerable children, and due to them being less visible to all agencies during lockdown. There will be a long-term impact for children experiencing hidden abuse, taking longer to receive support. There has also been an impact on new mothers experiencing difficulties in obtaining support during lockdown. The impact of worsening mental health, including the trauma experienced from enduring domestic abuse". – *North West LA*

Key changes that respondents predict are listed below:

Societal determinants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in poverty and worklessness • Ongoing and increasing parental factors (domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse) • Health inequalities • Potential anti-social behaviour and community unrest, particularly in the areas of highest deprivation • Increase in crime rates across all ages • Increases in children affected by, or vulnerable to exploitation • Increase need for emotional wellbeing and mental health services of children • Lack of employment opportunities for 16-25 year olds.
Presenting needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing UASC population • Impact of school closures on educational outcomes (widening the gap for disadvantaged children) • Ongoing rise in number of families requiring a service both in Children’s Services and SEND • Long term impact for children experiencing hidden harm • An upward trajectory of admissions to hospital and care due to deteriorating mental health including self-harm, eating disorders, drug use.
System factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued use of working virtually • Reduced resilience of staff - more social workers leaving the industry meaning an inexperienced workforce which also makes succession planning difficult • The lack of suitable, affordable placements • More councils issuing 114 notices • Increasing numbers of Care Leavers • The length of time children are looked after and/or on child protection plans is likely to increase as management of risk is affected due to the Covid-19 pandemic • Each LA continuing to implement new ways of working, continuing transformation plans and aiming to work more effectively and efficiently to greater impact for children • Investment into robust early help services.
Anticipated national legislation and policy change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Abuse Bill • SEND Review • Children’s Social Care Review • Local government reorganisation • The Local Government Reform Bill • Decisions on Troubled Families funding • Shaping of the provider market to ensure placement costs are sustainable and meet children’s needs.

Respondents were also positive about investment and/or improvements in early help, the front door, edge of care services and approach to permanency and specific models of practice such as No Wrong Door and Family Safeguarding to help them, building greater resilience into the system. An example of this from one authority who is adopting the ‘family safeguarding model’ to reduce the numbers of families requiring safeguarding support and therefore entering the care system. The local authority anticipates it will take 12 months to see a true reduction in need, but that will depend upon the severity of the enduring impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on communities. They anticipate a rise in the

number of Children in Need and children looked after as they adopt the new model but that cases will be open for a shorter period of time.

“Given the current challenges both in terms of the pandemic and the societal pressures it is highly likely that the demands on services will increase. Without wholesale investment in fully funded early help and support services the upstream costs will continue to rise. The negative impact on family and community health, wellbeing and financial stability is significant. The negative impact of indefinite uncertainty, and social restrictions, is causing mental distress and anxiety for many and it ‘chips away’ at usual resilience and protective factors. Therefore, responses from children’s services right across the system need to be sustained and robust”. – North West LA

19.2 Potential solutions

There is evidence that children’s services leaders are implementing, influencing or aware of what actions are needed to stem the spiralling factors that contribute to poor outcomes for children, young people and families. Children’s services leaders are clear that this needs a national, whole systems approach, tackled as an ‘adaptive challenge’.

“Without Covid, I'd be anticipating stabilisation at relatively low rates so long as we are able to continue to invest in edge of care and early intervention. Covid and the recession we are facing is a game changer. We need to act now to build community support services and ensure welfare benefits provide a better safety net than is currently the case for the most disadvantaged. If we do not, the impact for children's services will be unmanageable and we will face a tsunami of need.” - South West LA

Respondents suggested some solutions, including:

- Invest in a stronger preventative approach to mental health at universal level including stronger psychological and trauma pathways for children and families
- A stronger shared strategic approach and funding at national government level to drive greater integration, bringing adult mental health, children’s mental health, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol services alongside children's social care and health services to enable an holistic, community-centred focussed approach to meeting need at the earliest point
- Future proofing by investing in succession planning. Reversing the negative media impression of social workers and recognising the work that they do, encourage more people into the profession, and continued investment in programmes to train,

develop and support the workforce. This will be critical in the coming months to address worker 'burn out'

- Increased preventative activity in terms of relationship development and understanding domestic abuse for young people as they grow up, nationally led
- Ring fenced strong, well developed, partnership led early help systems
- A national system to fund payments to support special guardianship orders and the continuation of the Adoption Support Fund
- A significant review of the care system in terms of placement sufficiency, costs, and quality in the private placement market
- Seize the opportunity to be bold and create a restorative and inclusive education system that addresses the differential impacts of lost learning and lost childhoods
- A whole-government approach to children and families.

"It is inevitable that there will be increased demand and that we will need to find different ways of meeting this, through renewed attention to building community resilience and supporting universal services at much lower unit costs than traditional early help and specialist services." - East LA

20 Conclusion

In their *State of the nation 2020* report, DfE states that "*Recent reports have shown that the wellbeing of children in England and the UK remains relatively low compared with other countries and with decreasing trends over time.*" (DfE, 2020d). The increase in the number of children and families who require support from early help and children's social care services provides further evidence of this.

The increases in demand are clear. Over the 12 year period covered by the seven phases of ADCS's Safeguarding Pressures research, we have evidenced more initial contacts (+87%), more referrals (+19%), more children in need (+3%), more section 47 enquiries (+162%), more children subjects of child protection plans (+76%) and more children looked after (+32%), at a greater rate than population growth.

The diagram below illustrates this change in children's services activity and the diagram to the right provides a summary of the rates per 10,000 children in 2019/20.

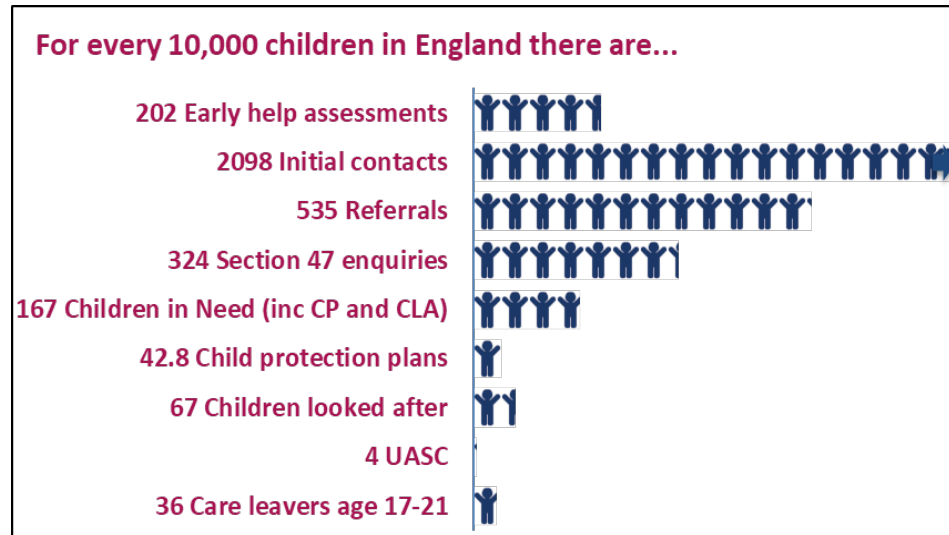


Figure 91: Rates per 10,000 of the 0-17 population

There is evidence that some local authorities have seen reductions most commonly in children subjects of child protection plans or looked after, and many authorities have been, and continue to be re-orienting services towards prevention and new ways of working effectively. The variation between local authorities and regions is more pronounced than previously, and the England averages mask a much more diverse picture, driven by a range of national and local factors such as the supported asylum population, number of UASC, funding, models of practice, and deprivation.

The reasons why children and families require support has changed little, but has become more pronounced. More children are living in families where there is reduced parenting capacity through domestic abuse, mental ill health or substance misuse. The impact of deprivation and housing issues is putting more families in acute stress and financial difficulties. More children are experiencing mental-ill health, are vulnerable to exploitation, and are demonstrating complex behavioural issues, often in adolescence. This has resulted in an increase in the number of older children coming to the attention of early help and social care.

Expenditure on children's social care has increased as a result of increased demand and increased unit costs. The impact of high-cost external placements is felt across the country. This is partly due to the rapaciousness of the private placement sector in driving up placement costs for profit, coupled with high demand and the increased complexity of children's needs leading to competition for placements.

Additional investment in some authorities, especially in early help, has been essential and the commitment to children's services by councils is welcome. However, demand and unexpected factors are outstripping investment, with directors being tenacious in maintaining improvement programmes to either reduce demand or, more likely 'steady the

ship'. This takes time. Responding authorities calculate a 9.1% budget deficit this year, with the total required now to close the budget gap in-year estimated at £824.1m to 'stay still'. The inequity and short-termist nature of funding pots, and lack of a longer term comprehensive spending review is unhelpful.

There continues to be a strong sense of positivity and mutual support across the country, with shared resources, ideas, and an unwavering focus on doing the right thing, at the right time to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and families.

Some of the lessons identified ten years ago remain apposite. Allen (2011), Munro (2011), Field (2010), Marmot (2010) and the seven phases of this ADCS research have directed us to a greater focus on promoting wellbeing and prevention more strongly. Evidence of the growth in early help services in many authorities is welcome, but these have become more targeted when, in the immediate future they will need to become more universal in order to aid children and families' recovery from the multiple negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

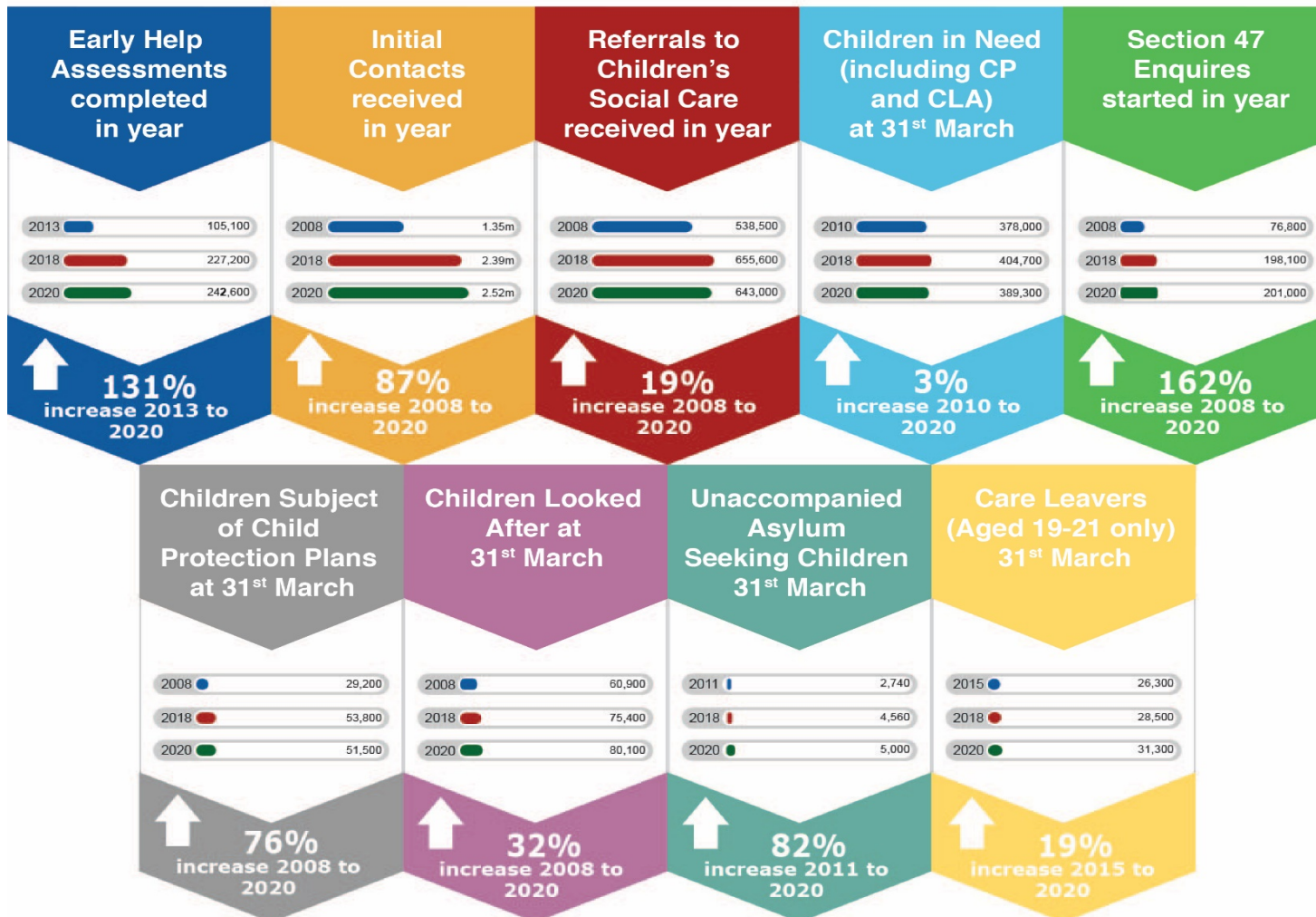
The longer term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, increase in demand and needs, together with funding uncertainty is not yet clear. Respondents predicted further increases in the number of children and families requiring support and increased complexity, with concern over their short-term and long-term educational achievement and mental health.

We must now turn our attention to how, collectively across central government departments, schools and local communities, we can mobilise rapid wraparound support for children and families to thrive, not just survive.

Now is the time for government to invest in children, drawing together at a national level the disparate policy initiatives and pots of funding for unconnected policy intentions, into one substantial, coherent whole. That way, we can make this a country that works for all children.

"In years to come, we could have a generation of kids who would never have the opportunity for secure permanent employment. There might be lots of zero hours opportunities, but that's not good, and the impact that's going to have then on the generation following as your role model, your parents do and have. I think that's a huge cloud on the horizon that we probably haven't even started to look at. These kids are going to be our next generation of parents. And if they have no sense of hope or optimism because there's no work then I think there's an awful lot of anxiety to come around the corner." – *North West LA*

Safeguarding Pressures: Change in children's services activity



Latest Data: Number at 30th September 2020



Figure 92: Where nationally available data is not available, results from responding authorities has been extrapolated to an all-England total based on proportion of population covered. Source of latest data: Regional quarterly datasets extrapolated to all England.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Definitions

This glossary provides definitions and descriptions of some of the terms and activity included in the Safeguarding Pressures report, to help readers who may not be familiar with this detail. Further guidance can be found in the DfE publication links below:

[Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#)

Initial Contact	Local authorities are required to submit data about referrals to children’s social care as part of the DfE Children in Need Census, but there is no requirement to report initial contacts. Whilst there is no nationally agreed definition and the subject of much debate, it is generally accepted that an initial contact is any contact received by local authority children’s services about a child, who may be a Child in Need, and where there is a request for general advice, information or a service. It may, or may not be accepted as a referral. This guidance was provided to authorities when submitting their data for the ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research.
Referral	A referral is defined by DfE as ‘a request for services to be provided by local authority children’s social care via the assessment process outlined in <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018</i> and is either in respect of a child not previously known to the local authority, or where a case was previously open but is now closed. New information about a child who is already the subject of an open case does not constitute a referral’.
Re-Referral	A re-referral is defined as a second referral within 12 months between start date of current referral and start date of previous referral.
Children in Need	Children in Need (CIN) are defined nationally as any case open to children's social care including children subjects of child protection plans and children looked after, as well as disabled children and care leavers aged over 18 who are supported. It includes children who have had a referral but may not yet have had an assessment as to whether they will require services.
Section 47 enquiry	A Section 47 enquiry refers to enquiries conducted under the provisions of Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.
Youth justice legal statuses	Children on remand or committed for trial, children detained in local authority accommodation under section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and children sentenced to Children and Young Persons Act 1969 Supervision Order with residence requirement.
Foster care	At present, DfE collect six categories of foster care placement data from local authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering (U1) • Foster placement with relative or friend who is also an approved adopter – FFA/concurrent planning (U2) • Foster placement with relative/friend who is not long-term or FFA/concurrent planning (U3) • Foster placement with other foster carer- long term fostering (U4) • Foster placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter – FFA/concurrent planning (U5) • Foster placement with other foster carer- not long term or FFA/concurrent planning (U6)
Adoption Legal Status	There are four legal statuses under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 for children who are placed for adoption: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placed for adoption with consent with current foster carer (A3) • Placed for adoption with placement order with current foster carer (A4) • Placed for adoption with consent not with current foster carer (A5) • Placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer (A6)

Placement Stability	<p>Long term stability of a child’s placement is currently defined as the percentage of children looked after aged under 16 at 31st March who had been looked after continuously for at least two and a half years who were living in the same placement for at least two years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement last for at least two years.</p> <p>Short term placement stability is defined as the percentage of children looked after at 31st March, excluding those placed for adoption, who had three or more placements in the year. As three or more is an indication of potential placement instability a low proportion is better.</p>
Decision to Adopt is reversed	<p>Data about the number of children where the decision to adopt has been reversed, defined as “This decision would be taken after a review has been made of the child’s case under regulation 36 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. If it is decided that the child should no longer be placed for adoption, the local authority should revise the child’s care plan and apply to the court to revoke the Placement Order. Any suspended Care Order will be resurrected. The local authority is required to regularly review the child’s case.” (DfE, 2015c).</p>
Care Leaver	<p>The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 states that a Care Leaver is someone who has been in the care of the Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday. The Children & Families Act 2014 introduced ‘Staying Put’ duties on local authorities to provide care leavers with the opportunity to remain with their former foster carer after they reach the age of 18, and Section 3 Children & Social Work Act 2017, which came into effect on 1st April 2018, placed new duties on local authorities to offer the support of a Personal Advisor to all care leavers to the age of 25 instead of age 21.</p>
Child Sexual Exploitation	<p>DfE (2017) defines child sexual exploitation and provides guidance. DfE (2017) published <i>Child sexual exploitation Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation</i> which defined CSE as: “Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.</p>
Contextual Safeguarding	<p>An approach to understanding, and responding to, young people’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families, including exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.</p>

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