



**BRIEFING PAPER**

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# Children's social care services in England

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## Summary

This House of Commons Library briefing paper provides an overview of the key challenges currently facing local authority children's social care services in England.

The 152 upper-tier local authorities in England have statutory responsibility for protecting the welfare of children and delivering children's social care. Social care services, for children most at risk of harm, are generally situated within or alongside broader children's services.

The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for the legal and policy frameworks within which children's social care services operate. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) provides funding to local authorities for children's services. Children's social care is a devolved policy area.

### The legal context

The *Children Act 1989* (as amended) places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need within their area, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.

Local authorities are the statutory point of referral for any concerns about risks to children's welfare. They have the autonomy to set their own protocols for working with children referred to their social care, although these must be consistent with legislation and the [Government's statutory guidance](#).

When a child is referred to a local authority, the authority will assess the course of action to take based on the safeguarding thresholds set in its protocols. Depending on what the local authority assesses the severity of the risk to the child to be, courses of action could include:

- no further action or a referral to more universal services;
- the provision of services appropriate to the child's needs (under Section 17 of the *Children Act 1989*);
- a child protection conference, which might result in a child protection plan (under Section 47 of the *Children Act 1989*); and
- in the most severe cases, action to take the child into the care of the local authority.

### The policy context

In July 2016, the DfE published [Putting children first](#), setting out its ambition to reform and improve children's social care by 2020. The Department subsequently revised its ambition: "**to ensure that all vulnerable children, no matter where they live, receive the same high quality of care and support by 2022**", and published a ['roadmap'](#) for how it intends to transform children's social care services.

The Government's reform programme aims to achieve:

## 4 Children's social care services in England

- a highly capable and skilled social work workforce;
- high-performing services everywhere; and
- a practice and learning system that enables, identifies and spreads excellence and innovation.

To this end, the Department has funded and implemented a range of initiatives, including: £200 million distributed through the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme; £15 million for a Supporting Families: Investing in Practice programme; £45 million for Partners in Practice; Regional Improvement Alliances; a What Works Centre for Children's Social Care; £84 million over five years from April 2019 to support up to 20 local authorities to improve their social work practice; workforce initiatives; and a National Stability Forum.

In 2016, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee concluded that the DfE was "worryingly complacent" that nothing could be done to improve services more quickly. In a further inquiry, completed in 2019, the Committee criticised the Government's "slow progress" with reforming children's services and called on it to "improve both the quality and the cost-effectiveness of children's social care in measurable ways by its goal of 2022".

### **Demand for social care**

As at 31 March 2018: 404,710 children were assessed as being in need; 53,790 children had a child protection plan in place; and 75,420 children were being looked after.

DfE data on local authority social care activity between 31 March 2010 and 2018 showed an increase in activity across a range of measures: children in need (+8%), child protection enquiries (+122%), child protection plans (+38%) and looked after children (+17%). The number of referrals made to children's social care services per year also increased by 7% from around 615,000 in 2010/11 to 665,000 in 2017/18.

Multiple factors have been attributed as potentially contributing to the increase in demand for children's social care services, including:

- Wider societal determinants linked to poverty.
- New and greater risks to children and young people - for example, from County Lines, gang violence, and child sexual exploitation.
- An increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- A growth in the overall child population.
- An increase in the number of assessments of children in need which feature risks to child welfare from domestic abuse, parental mental ill-health and parental substance misuse.
- Cuts to early intervention services, leading to greater demand for acute social care.
- Greater awareness and referrals in the wake of high profile cases, such as those involving child sexual exploitation in Rotherham and

other areas, and the murders of Peter Connelly (known as “Baby P”) and Daniel Pelka.

- More care leavers as a result of the increase in the number of children looked after and extended care leaver duties to age 25.

There is limited understanding of the relative importance of different drivers of demand.

## Funding for social care

Local authorities’ children’s services are funded primarily through grant funding from central government. Funding is not ring-fenced; it is for local authorities to decide how to prioritise their spending.

In addition to the core funding allocated through the current local government finance settlement, the Government announced additional funding for children’s social care at the Autumn Budget 2018:

- an **additional £410 million in 2019/20** for adults and children’s social care; and
- **£84 million over 5 years from April 2019** to support up to 20 local authorities to improve their social work practice and decision-making.

The increase in demand for children’s social care services, combined with reductions in central government funding to local authorities and increases in care costs, has increasingly put local authorities’ finances under pressure. According to the Local Government Association (LGA), spending on children’s social care has increased at a faster rate than any other area of council business.

Local authorities in England spent £8.84 billion on children’s social care in 2017/18; nine out of ten authorities exceeded their spending budgets. Whilst local authorities overall have protected funding for children’s social care, they have significantly reduced spending on non-statutory preventative and early intervention children’s services.

Commentators are concerned that the current levels of funding are not sustainable. The LGA estimates that children’s services will face a £1.1 billion funding gap in 2019/20 and a funding gap of around £3 billion by 2024/25.

## Variation between local authorities

There is considerable variation between local authorities in the activity and cost of children’s social care. There is limited understanding of why this occurs, although there is a consensus that the level of deprivation in an area is a key contributory factor.

Some variation in children’s social care activity between local authorities is to be expected. However, some commentators are concerned that vulnerable children and families face a “postcode lottery” in the levels of social care support provided by local authorities.

The Government has commissioned external research to improve its understanding of the relative drivers of 'need to spend' on children's services. The research is expected to be completed by summer 2019.

### **Standards of social care services**

Ofsted inspections show that the overall effectiveness of local authorities' children's services in England has improved; the proportion judged 'good' or 'outstanding' increased from 36% (after every local authority's first Single Inspection Framework inspection) to 42% at 31 August 2018, with a decrease in the proportion judged 'inadequate', from 22% to 13%. 45% of authorities at 31 August 2018 were judged to 'require improvement to be good'.

The DfE is responsible for intervening in services that Ofsted judges inadequate. At 10 December 2018, the DfE was intervening and directly working with 21 local authorities on this basis.

### **The social care workforce**

Many local authorities are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified social workers, with a consequent reliance on more costly agency social workers.

Nationally, at 30 September 2018 there was a social worker vacancy rate of 16.5%, a turnover rate of 15.2% and an agency staff rate of 15.4%. However, the national figures mask large variations between local authorities: with children's social worker vacancy rates ranging from 49.5% to 0%; and agency staff rates varying from 53.8% to 0.9%.

National and local initiatives have been introduced to address workforce challenges. The Local Government Association has called on the Government to work with local government on a national recruitment campaign.

### **Outcomes for children in need**

It is generally acknowledged both that the majority of looked after children experience more positive outcomes than they would have if they were not taken into care, and that children in care often experience better outcomes than those in the wider group of 'children in need'. However, children in care and those leaving care face a variety of lower outcomes compared to their peers.

Understanding the routes to and causes of these outcomes is challenging. In particular, it is an area of contention as to whether these outcomes are a necessary result of the circumstances that children in the care system have experienced, or whether the care system could and should do more to alleviate and mitigate these impacts.

The DfE has completed a review of support for children in need to help understand what makes a difference to and what is needed to improve those children's educational outcomes.

# 1. Children's social care - background

The 152 upper-tier local authorities in England have statutory responsibility for protecting the welfare of children and delivering children's social care.

Social care services are generally situated within or alongside broader children's services. The Department for Education (DfE) research report [Children's services: spending and delivery](#) (July 2016) provided the following explanation of the types of children's services that local authorities provide:

Local councils describe their children's services by using a four-tier model, which may be represented as a pyramid or continuum of needs.

**Tier 1:** Universal services such as schools, and health visiting.

**Tier 2:** Targeted services for children and families beginning to experience, or at risk of, difficulties; for example school counselling, parenting programmes, and support for teenage parents.

**Tier 3:** Specialist services for children and families with multiple needs such as intensive family support, and services for children with disabilities.

**Tier 4:** Specialist services for children and families with severe and complex needs, including child protection services, and looked after children.<sup>1</sup>

Children's social care services sit within tiers 3 and 4 of this framework:

**Non statutory services:** Tier 1 and tier 2 services for cases with a lower level of need than children in need and looked after children.

**Statutory services:** Tier 3 and tier 4 services for children in need, and looked after children, as established in the Children Act 1989.<sup>2</sup>

Social care services may include:

- services for looked after children<sup>3</sup>, including fostering and residential care
- court liaison and advisory services
- adoption
- child protection
- family support
- services for children with disabilities

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, [Children's services: spending and delivery: Research report by Aldaba and the Early Intervention Foundation](#), July 2016, p7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p9

<sup>3</sup> Under the *Children Act 1989*, a child is legally defined as 'looked after' by a local authority if he or she is provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours, or is subject to a care order.

Local authorities work with other bodies such as the police, health and education services, and private and voluntary care providers, to meet their statutory duties.

The Department for Education is responsible for the legal and policy frameworks within which children's social care services operate. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government provides funding to local authorities for children's services.

## 1.1 The legal context

The *Children Act 1989* (as amended) places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need within their area, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.<sup>4</sup>

The term 'child in need' can encompass a wide range of children and adolescents, in need of varying types of support and intervention. A child is defined as 'in need' under section 17 of the *Children Act 1989*, where:

- they are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for them of services by a local authority;
- their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for them of such services; or
- they are disabled.<sup>5</sup>

Children in need make up a small minority of all children. At 31 March 2016, an estimated 3% of all children were in need of help and protection, and around 6% of all children were in need at some point throughout the year.<sup>6</sup>

The *Children Act 2004* (as amended by the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*) requires the local authority, police and clinical commissioning groups to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

The Government's document [Working Together to Safeguard Children – Statutory framework: legislation relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children](#) explains the legislative framework in more detail.<sup>7</sup>

Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance: [Working together to safeguard children](#) (last updated 1 August 2018) sets out how agencies and organisations should work together to safeguard and

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<sup>4</sup> Section 17(1) of the *Children Act 1989*

<sup>5</sup> Section 17(10) of the *Children Act 1989*

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education, [Children in need of help and protection - data and analysis](#), 16 March 2018, Section 2.1, p8

<sup>7</sup> HM Government, [Working Together to Safeguard Children – Statutory framework: legislation relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children](#), July 2018

promote the welfare of children. The guidance defines 'safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children' broadly as:

- protecting children from maltreatment.
- preventing impairment of children's health or development.
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

Local authorities are the statutory point of referral for any concerns about risks to children's welfare. They have the autonomy to set their own protocols and thresholds for working with children referred to their social care, although protocols must be consistent with legislation and the Government's statutory guidance.

When a child is referred to a local authority, the authority will assess the course of action to take based on the safeguarding thresholds set in its own protocols. Box 1 below provides a summary of potential courses of action.

#### **Box 1: Key stages in children's social care**

Depending on what the local authority assesses the severity of the risk to the child to be, courses of action could include:

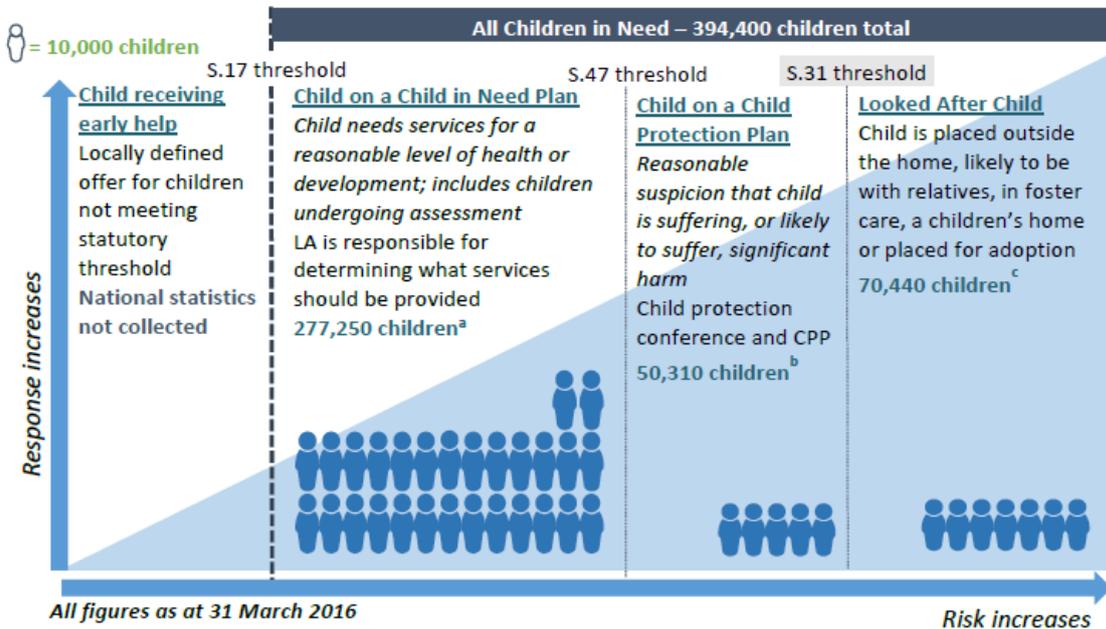
- at the **referral stage**, a local authority can decide to take no further action, or refer a child to more universal services, such as those provided by children's centres;
- if, following an initial referral and assessment, a local authority decides that a child requires further support then, under **section 17 of the Children Act 1989**, they will be defined as a child in need. Under this classification, the local authority is required to provide the child with a range and level of services appropriate to their needs;
- in **cases where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm**, under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 the local authority can launch an investigation into their welfare. This is generally in partnership with other agencies, such as the police. If concerns are substantiated and the child is judged to be at continuing risk of harm, then an initial **child protection conference** should be convened within 15 working days;
- at the initial child protection conference, the decision will be made as to whether the child needs to become the subject of a **child protection plan**; and
- in the most severe cases immediate action will be taken **to take a child into the care of the local authority**. These children will be looked-after by local councils, and usually live with foster carers, or in residential care settings such as children's homes.

**Source:** National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 1.8

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children](#), July 2018, p6

The DfE figure below provides an overview of statutory thresholds for children in need:<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 1.0 - Overview of statutory thresholds for Children in Need**



The Commons Library briefing paper CBP-7730: [Local authority support for children in need \(England\)](#) provides further information on the assessment process and the services available to children in need and their families in England.

## 1.2 The policy context

### The Government's policy objectives

In 2010, the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the [Munro Review of child protection](#), which recommended major reform of children's social work when it reported in May 2011. It proposed 15 recommendations designed to create "a better balance between essential rules, principles, and professional expertise" and ensure that children's services could be more "child-centred" and less bureaucratic.<sup>10</sup>

In July 2016, the DfE published [Putting children first](#), setting out its **ambition to reform and improve children's social care by 2020**.<sup>11</sup> It built on a previous policy paper: [Children's social care reform: a vision for change](#) (January 2016).

The strategy set out reform in three key areas:

1. **people and leadership** – bringing the best into the profession and giving them the right knowledge and skills

<sup>9</sup> Department for Education, [Children in need of help and protection - data and analysis](#), 16 March 2018, Section 2.1, p8

<sup>10</sup> E Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – a child-centred system](#), Cm 8062, Department for Education, May 2011

<sup>11</sup> Department for Education, [Putting children first: Delivering our vision for excellent children's social care](#), July 2016

for the challenging but hugely rewarding work ahead, and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence

2. **practice and systems** – creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish, learning from the very best practice, and learning from when things go wrong
3. **governance and accountability** – making sure that what we are doing is working, and developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services.<sup>12</sup>

In October 2016 the National Audit Office (NAO) published a highly critical report - [Children in need of help or protection](#) – which concluded that nationally the quality of help and protection for children was unsatisfactory and inconsistent, and the Government had made poor progress in improving children’s social care services. On publication of the report the head of the NAO, Amyas Morse, said:

Six years have passed since the Department recognised that children's services were not good enough. It is extremely disappointing that, after all its efforts, far too many children's services are still not good enough. To achieve its new goal of improving the quality of all services by 2020 the Department will need to inject more energy, pace and determination in delivering on its responsibilities.<sup>13</sup>

In 2016 the National Audit Office concluded that nationally the quality of help and protection for children was unsatisfactory and inconsistent.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee’s 2016–17 inquiry into [Child protection](#) concluded that:

...The Department seemed to us worryingly complacent that nothing can be done to improve [Children’s] services more quickly. The Department’s newly stated ambition to improve services by 2020 is welcome but the Department lacks a credible plan for how and by when it will make a difference and ensure that local authorities are intervening effectively to make a difference to these children’s lives...<sup>14</sup>

The DfE subsequently published a ‘[roadmap](#)’ for how it intends to transform children’s social care services, which sets out the Government’s revised ambition “**to ensure that all vulnerable children, no matter where they live, receive the same high quality of care and support by 2022**”. Its reform programme aims to achieve:

- a highly capable and skilled social work workforce;
- high-performing services everywhere; and
- a practice and learning system that enables, identifies and spreads excellence and innovation.<sup>15</sup>

The Department for Education revised its delivery date to reform and improve children’s social care from 2020 to 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, [Putting children first: Delivering our vision for excellent children’s social care](#), July 2016, p5

<sup>13</sup> National Audit Office, [Children in need of help or protection](#), HC 723, 12 October 2016

<sup>14</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, [Child protection: Thirty-first Report of Session 2016–17](#), HC 713, 16 December 2016, p3

<sup>15</sup> [Letter from the Permanent Secretary of the DfE to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee](#), 18 September 2017

## The Government's reform programme

The Government's reform programme includes the following initiatives:

- The [Children's Social Care Innovation Programme](#), under which the DfE has since 2014 distributed £200 million to 98 projects in 116 local authorities and third-sector organisations in order to develop and spread more effective and efficient approaches to supporting children.<sup>16</sup> Information about the individual projects, as well as insights gained from the Programme as a whole, are available on the [Innovation Programme Projects and Insights webpage](#).
- **£15 million for Supporting Families; Investing in Practice programme** – the programme is looking to work with up to 40 local authorities to test and expand two projects (Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) and a model of family group conferencing (FGC)) from the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. Programme implementation will be overseen by the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care.<sup>17</sup>
- [Partners in Practice](#), which brings together the best practitioners and leaders in children's social care to support wider improvement across the children's social care system. The DfE has invested £45 million in 15 local authorities.<sup>18</sup>
- **Regional Improvement Alliances**, through which, as with the Partners in Practice Programme, the DfE is seeking to create a national infrastructure in which stronger-performing authorities support those at risk of failing.<sup>19</sup>
- A [What Works Centre for Children's Social Care](#) to foster a culture of evidence-informed practice. The DfE is funding the development of the Centre which will be established in 2020.<sup>20</sup>
- In the 2018 Autumn Budget the Government provided **a further £84 million over five years from April 2019** to support up to 20 local authorities to improve their social work practice and decision-making.<sup>21</sup>
- A new **national assessment and accreditation system**, intended to introduce a new practice-focused methodology to establish the knowledge and skills that child and family social workers need.<sup>22</sup>
- Further programmes aimed at the **children's social care workforce**, including £24 million to support Teaching

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<sup>16</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 2.7

<sup>17</sup> Department for Education, [£15 million investment to help keep families safely together](#), 22 May 2019

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Department for Education, [£20 million improvement programme for children's social care](#), 12 October 2017

<sup>20</sup> [What Works Centre for Children's Social Care](#) website [Accessed 28 March 2019]

<sup>21</sup> [PQ 200076 \[Social Services: Children\]](#), 13 December 2018

<sup>22</sup> Department for Education, [Confidence in practice: child and family social work assessment and accreditation system](#), 8 December 2017

Partnerships and the fast-track entry programmes, Step Up to Social Work and Frontline.<sup>23</sup>

- A **National Stability Forum for Children's Social Care** with the aim of improving stability for all children in the care system.<sup>24</sup> The Forum's membership and Terms of Reference can be found here: <https://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/commons/2019-03-07/229791>.

In August 2018, the DfE published a 'children's social care statutory guidance myth busting guide' with the aim of clarifying what local authorities are permitted to do within existing legislation and guidance. However, the document drew criticism from the sector, with an [open letter from 50 social work organisations and academics](#) in September 2018 complaining that it was in conflict with existing laws and guidance on seven points.<sup>25</sup> Following the threat of legal action,<sup>26</sup> the Government has withdrawn the guidance.<sup>27</sup>

The Government has also implemented sector specific reviews, notably on fostering. For further information see the DfE's response to the Education Select Committee's *Fostering* report and the independent *Foster Care in England* report: [Fostering Better Outcomes](#) (July 2018).

## National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee inquiries 2017-19

A National Audit Office (NAO) inquiry into [Pressures on children's social care](#), published on 23 January 2019, criticised the Government for failing to fully understand what is driving demand for children's social care or why there is considerable variation between local authorities in their children's social care activity and costs. Whilst recognising that the Government is now conducting further analysis, the NAO concluded that, without a well-informed pathway, **it will be a "tall order" for the Government to achieve its goal that all vulnerable children, no matter where they live, should have access to high-quality support by 2022.**<sup>28</sup>

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee's [report on its inquiry on Transforming children's services](#) (March 2019) **criticised the Government's slow progress in improving children's social care services and the lack of clarity on what sustainable improvements it seeks to achieve:**

For the avoidance of doubt, we expect the Department to improve both the quality and the cost-effectiveness of children's social care in measurable ways by its goal of 2022. This will

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee has criticised the Government's slow progress in improving children's social care services.

<sup>23</sup> [PQ 203968 \[Children: Social Services\], 8 January 2019](#)

<sup>24</sup> [PQ 229793 \[Children: Social Services\], 15 March 2019](#)

<sup>25</sup> 'Minister defends children's services 'myth busting' guide following criticism it could cause harm', *Community Care*, 12 September 2018

<sup>26</sup> '[Government backs down over 'myth-busting' guide on child protection](#)', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2019

<sup>27</sup> '[DfE withdraws 'mythbuster' following charity's legal threat](#)', *Children and Young People Now*, 25 March 2019

<sup>28</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 18

require a step-change in the Department's understanding of pressures, the reduction of unnecessary variation between areas in their social care activities and the costs of providing them, and greater pace in its work with struggling local authorities. The sector is not financially sustainable: 91% of local authorities exceeded their budgets for spending on children's services in 2017–18. It is imperative that the Department get to grips with its understanding of demand pressures if it is to make a compelling case for adequate resources in the anticipated spending review...<sup>29</sup>

The [Government's response](#), published on 10 June 2019, accepted many of the Committee's recommendations and outlined work underway across Government Departments intended to address some of the concerns raised in the Committee's report.

### Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee inquiry 2017-19

The House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee conducted an [inquiry into funding of local authorities' children's services](#). The Committee concluded that funding for children's services was not sufficient to enable local authorities to fulfil their statutory duties, deliver non-statutory duties (e.g. early help services) and secure the long-term sustainability of local authorities' children's services.

The Committee report,<sup>30</sup> published on 1 May 2019, called for the following:

- The Spending Review 2018 must reflect the challenges facing local authorities and core funding should increase by a minimum of £3.1 billion
- Increased funding must go hand-in-hand with systemic change if local authority children's services are to be sustainable in the long-term
- More work needs to be undertaken to understand and address the factors driving ever increasing demand for children's services.
- Barriers to creating greater residential care placement capacity should be investigated and addressed
- The Government must better understand the pressures facing social workers and the wider care workforce to improve recruitment and retention.<sup>31</sup>

On publication of the Committee report the Committee Chair, Clive Betts, commented:

Supporting vulnerable children is one of the most important duties that local authorities provide. It is vital that we have the right support available in every part of the country, to ensure that

<sup>29</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, [Transforming Children's Services – Eighty-Eighth Report of Session 2017-19](#), HC 1741, 22 March 2019, Summary, p3

<sup>30</sup> House of Commons HCLG Committee, [Funding of local authorities' children's services: Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19](#), HC 1638, 1 May 2019

<sup>31</sup> House of Commons HCLG Committee, [Children's services at breaking point – Government must back local authorities with funding that meets demand](#), 1 May 2019

vulnerable children get the support they need. Over the last decade we have seen a steady increase in the number of children needing support, whilst at the same time funding has failed to keep up.

It is clear that this approach cannot be sustained, and the Government must make serious financial and systemic changes to support local authorities in helping vulnerable children. They must understand why demand is increasing and whether it can be reduced. They must ensure that the funding formula actually allows local authorities to meet the obligations for supporting children that the Government places on them.

We have reached a crisis point and action is needed now.<sup>32</sup>

The Committee awaits the Government's response to its report.

### **Further policy background**

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) has published a detailed [children's services policy timeline](#) from 2007 onwards that illustrates the key events and changes that impact on safeguarding children and young people in England.

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<sup>32</sup> HCLG Committee, [Children's services at breaking point – Government must back local authorities with funding that meets demand](#), 1 May 2019

## 2. Demand for social care

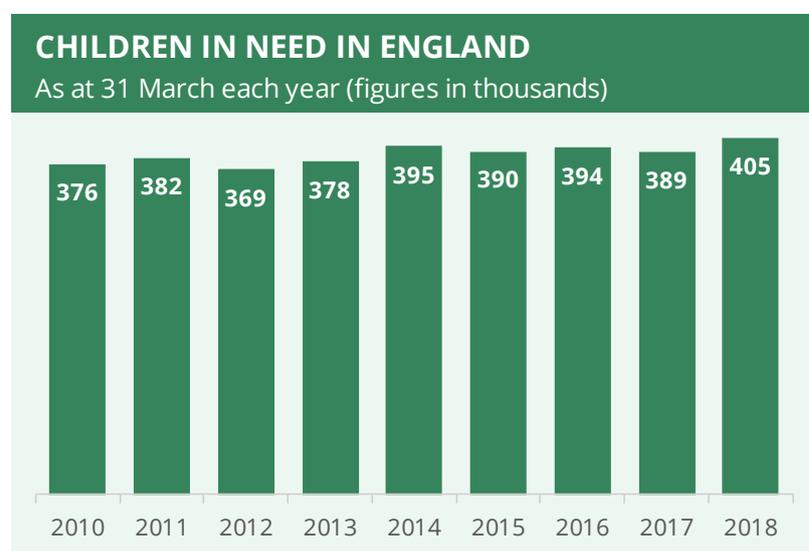
There is no single objective measure of the number of children who need or might benefit from support or intervention. Data on levels of local authority activity in response to social care referrals is generally used as a measure of demand. However, activity is also determined by local thresholds, and the scale of any need not identified through referrals is necessarily unknown.

Department for Education (DfE) data on local authority social care activity between 31 March 2010 and 2018 showed an increase in activity across a range of measures: children in need (+8%), child protection enquiries (+122%), child protection plans (+38%) and looked after children (+17%). The number of referrals made to children's social care services per year also increased by 7% from around 615,000 in 2010/11 to 665,000 in 2017/18. The DfE data is examined in more detail below.

### 2.1 Number of children in need

The chart below shows the number of children in need since 2010. The number was at its lowest in 2012 at 369,410 and is currently at its highest - as at 31 March 2018 there were 404,710 children in need in England.

404,710 children were assessed by local authorities as being in need at 31 March 2018.



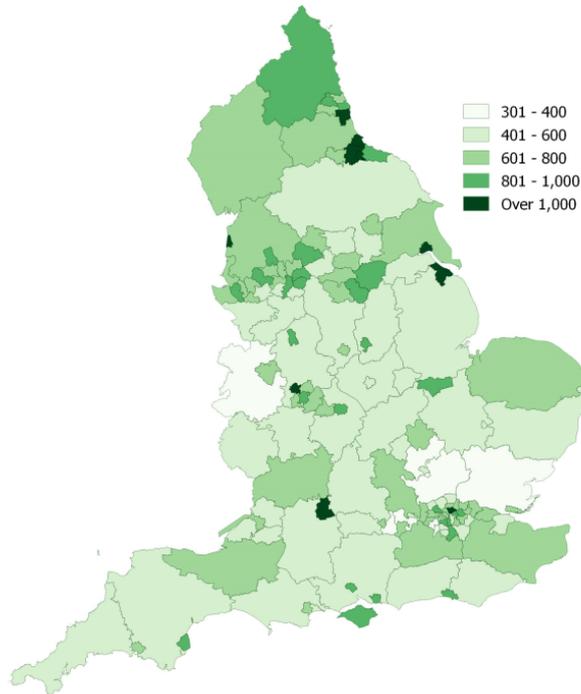
Source: [DFE Children in Need Statistics](#)

The rate of children in need per 100,000 population of 0-18 year olds shows considerable variation across local authority areas. As the map overleaf shows, in 2017/18 some local authorities had a rate of over 1,000 children in need per 100,000 population while others had under 400 per 100,000.

Blackpool had the highest rate of children in need in 2017/18 – 1,323 per 100,000 of the 0-18 population – while Hertfordshire had the lowest rate (301 per 100,000).

## CHILDREN IN NEED IN ENGLAND

2017/18: Rate per 100,000 population of 0-18 year olds



### HIGHEST AND LOWEST CHILDREN IN NEED RATE

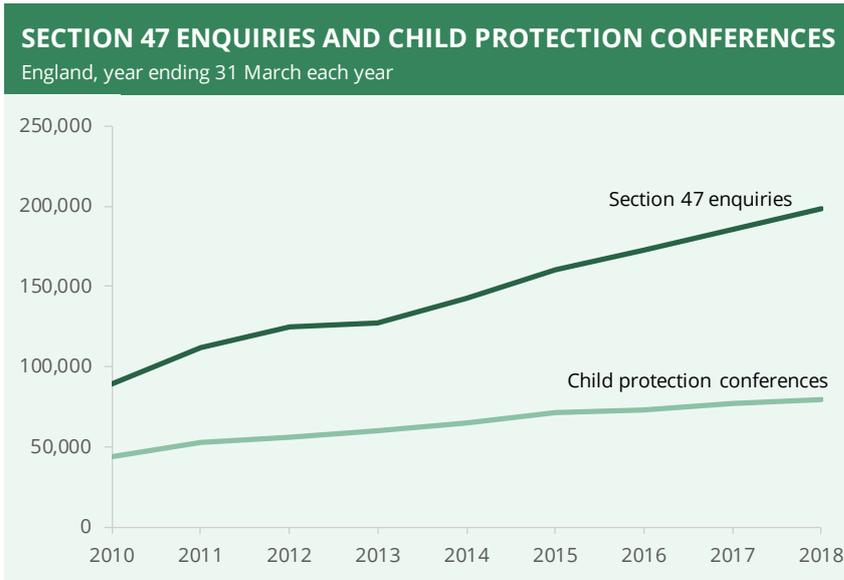
Five highest		Five lowest	
Blackpool	1,323	Hertfordshire	301
Sunderland	1,256	Shropshire	324
Kingston upon Hull	1,247	Richmond upon Thames	326
Wolverhampton	1,173	Kingston upon Thames	344
North East Lincolnshire	1,164	Wokingham	360

## 2.2 Number of section 47 enquiries and child protection conferences

If a local authority identifies there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm, it will carry out an assessment under section 47 of the *Children Act 1989* to determine if it needs to take steps to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. If concerns are substantiated and the child is judged to be at continuing risk of harm then an initial child protection conference should be convened within 15 working days.

The chart below shows that Section 47 enquiries and child protection conferences have increased year on year since 2010. Between 2010 and 2018 the number of Section 47 enquiries increased by 122% from 89,300 in 2010 to 198,090 in 2018. Over the same period the number of child protection conferences increased by 81% from 43,900 to 79,470.

The number of Section 47 enquiries and child protection conferences have increased year on year since 2010.

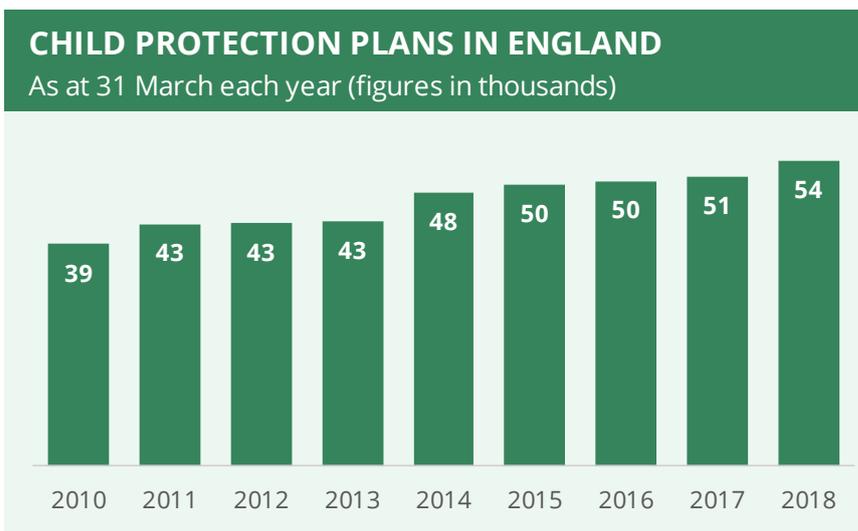


Source: DFE Children in Need Statistics

### 2.3 Number of child protection plans

At the initial child protection conference, the decision will be made as to whether the child needs to become the subject of a child protection plan. The number of children who became subject to a child protection plan has also increased year on year since 2010. In the year ending 31 March 2018 a total of 53,790 children in England had a child protection plan in place, compared with 39,100 in 2010 (an increase of 38%).

As at 31 March 2018 there were a total of 53,790 children with a child protection plan in place, an increase of 38% from 2010.



Source: DFE Children in Need Statistics

### 2.4 The number of looked after children

The number of children looked after has also increased in recent years. As at 31 March 2018 there were a total of 75,420 looked after children in England, a +17% increase on the 2010 figure of 64,470. The table

below shows that the majority of looked after children are in foster placements, followed by secure units and children's homes.

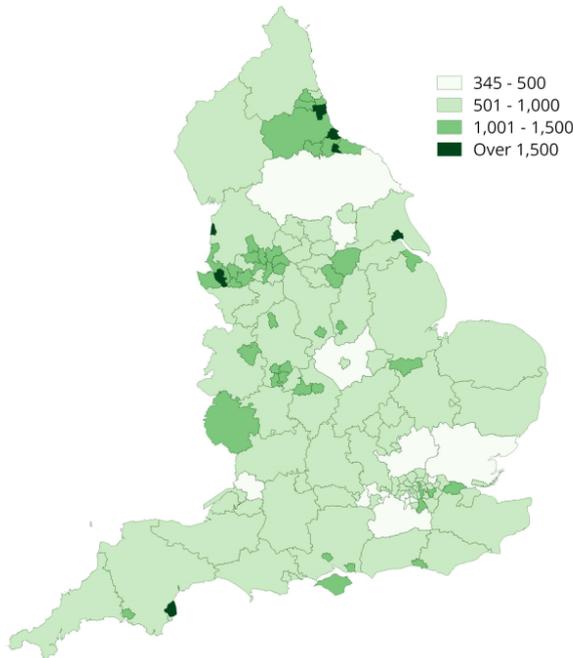
<b>CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER IN ENGLAND BY PLACEMENT TYPE</b>				
As at 31 March each year				
	2010	2018	Change 2010 to 2018	
			Number	%
Foster placements	46,890	55,200	+8,310	+18%
Placed for adoption	2,530	2,230	-300	-12%
Placement with parents	4,210	4,700	+490	+12%
Other placement in the community	2,440	3,100	+660	+27%
Secure units, children's homes	6,250	8,530	+2,280	+36%
Other residential settings	950	1,230	+280	+29%
Residential schools	1,000	130	-870	-87%
<b>All children looked after</b>	<b>64,470</b>	<b>75,420</b>	<b>+10,950</b>	<b>+17%</b>

Note: Figures rounded to the nearest ten. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

[Source: DFE Looked After Children Statistics](#)

In 2017/18 most local authorities had a rate of between 500 and 1,000 looked after children per 100,000 population of 0-18 year olds. The highest rate (2,414 per 100,000) was observed in Blackpool and the lowest in Wokingham (346).

**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN ENGLAND**  
2017/18: Rate per 100,000 population of 0-18 year olds



HIGHEST AND LOWEST LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN RATE			
Five highest		Five lowest	
Blackpool	2,414	Wokingham	346
Middlesbrough	1,765	Richmond upon Thames	354
Hartlepool	1,673	Windsor and Maidenhead	425
Kingston upon Hull	1,642	South Gloucestershire	442
Torbay	1,567	Essex	450

## 2.5 Drivers of demand

Multiple factors have been attributed as potentially contributing to the increase in demand for children’s social care services. However, there is limited understanding of the relative impact of different drivers.

The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) collected qualitative and quantitative data from local authorities in six phases spanning 2007/8 to 2017/18 to evidence and better understand changes in demand for, and provision of, children’s social care. [Phase 6 of the research project](#) – published in November 2018 - concluded that the increase in demand across all aspects of children’s social care arises from:

- Wider societal determinants linked to poverty.
- New and greater risks to children and young people - for example, from County Lines, gang violence, child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and female genital mutilation.
- An increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- More care leavers as a result of the increase in the number of children looked after and extended care leaver duties to age 25.

Multiple factors have been attributed as potentially contributing to the increase in demand for children’s social care services.

- A growth in the overall child population.<sup>33</sup>
- Additional new duties from legislation and policy.<sup>34</sup>

The report explained the role of wider societal determinants:

These wider societal determinants, such as poverty driven by the cumulative impacts of welfare reform, insecure work and lack of affordable housing, lead to an increased risk of strained, poor-quality family relationship, which in turn increases the risk of poor-quality parenting, parental mental ill-health and emotional distress. The cumulative impacts of these factors affect children's wellbeing, which in turn affect their outcomes and life chances. If these factors are not addressed, and taking into account the projected continued growth in population, then we can expect the number of children and families who require support to continue to grow, unabated.<sup>35</sup>

Other factors that have been identified as contributing to increased demand include:

- an increase in the number of assessments of children in need which feature risks to child welfare from domestic abuse, parental mental ill-health and parental substance misuse (often referred to as the 'toxic trio').
- cuts to early intervention services, leading to greater demand for acute social care.
- greater awareness and referrals in the wake of high profile cases, such as those involving child sexual exploitation in Rotherham and other areas, and the murders of Peter Connelly (known as "Baby P") and Daniel Pelka.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> According to the National Audit Office, the 0-17 year population growth between 2010 and 2017 was 5.2% (NAO, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 1.15)

<sup>34</sup> ADCS, [ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Research Phase 6](#), November 2018, p119

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p120

<sup>36</sup> See: National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 12; and All Party Parliamentary Group for Children (APPGC), [No Good Options: Report of the Inquiry into Children's Social Care in England](#), 17 March 2017, p2 and p9

### 3. Funding for social care

Local authorities' children's services are funded primarily through the grant funding from central government.<sup>37</sup> Funding is not ring-fenced; it is for local authorities to decide how to prioritise their spending based on local priorities and need.

In addition to the core funding allocated through the current local government finance settlement, the Government announced additional funding for children's social care at the Autumn Budget 2018:

- an **additional £410 million in 2019/20** for adults and children's social care; and
- **£84 million over 5 years from April 2019** to support up to 20 local authorities with high or rising demand for children's social care to work more effectively with their most vulnerable families.<sup>38</sup>

Local authority funding for future years will be determined through the 2019 Spending Review.

#### 3.1 Local authority expenditure

Local authorities in England spent £8.84 billion on children's social care in 2017/18.

In 2014/15 expenditure on 'services to young people' was reclassified to Children and Families Social Care services expenditure. As a result, expenditure on children and families social care cannot be tracked back to 2010/11 on a consistent basis. The table below shows two separate time series, but both suggest that expenditure on children's social care has been protected by local authorities, during a period in which Government funding for local authorities has fallen in real terms.<sup>39</sup>

LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE			
England £ billions			
	Cash	Real Terms (2017/18 Prices)	Real terms Annual % change
2010/11	6.65	7.45	
2011/12	6.42	7.10	-4.7%
2012/13	6.61	7.16	+0.9%
2013/14	6.92	7.35	+2.7%
2014/15	8.09	8.49	
2015/16	8.30	8.65	+1.8%
2016/17	8.48	8.64	-0.1%
2017/18	8.84	8.84	+2.4%

<sup>37</sup> Nb. Local government funding is complex and currently consists of several funding streams, including: central government grants, the Business Rates Retention Scheme and council tax.

<sup>38</sup> [PQ 235757 \[Children in Care\] 27 March 2019](#)

<sup>39</sup> National Audit Office, [Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018](#), 8 March 2018

Sources:

[MHLG: Local authority revenue expenditure and financing data](#)

[HMT: GDP Deflator December 2018](#)

According to the National Audit Office, although looked after children make up a minority of the total number of children in need, in 2018/19 they account for more than half of all local authority budgeted spending on children's services.<sup>40</sup> Department for Education research found that, on average, local authority annual spend per 'looked after child' was £45,650 in 2015/16, and average annual spend per 'child in need' was £10,780.<sup>41</sup> An increase in the number of looked after children can therefore have a significant impact on local authority expenditure.

### 3.2 Variations in local authority expenditure

There is considerable variation in children's services spending across local authorities in England. In 2017/18 Islington spent £1,626 per 0-18 year old, while Wokingham spent £418.

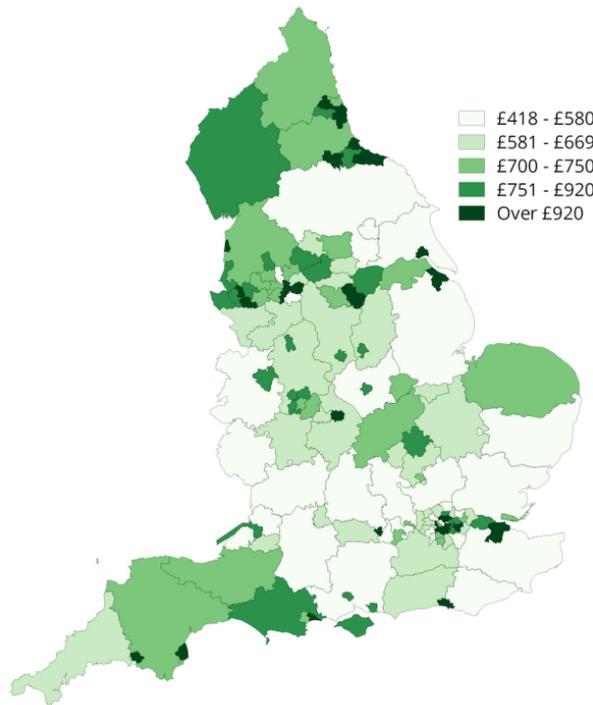
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<sup>40</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 1.24

<sup>41</sup> Department for Education, [Children's services: spending, 2010-11 to 2015-16, November 2017](#), paras 8-9

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES SPENDING IN ENGLAND

2017/18: £ per 0-18 year old



HIGHEST AND LOWEST CHILDREN'S SERVICES SPENDING PER HEAD			
Five highest		Five lowest	
Islington	£1,626	Wokingham	£418
Blackpool	£1,326	North Yorkshire	£427
Rotherham	£1,320	South Gloucestershire	£446
Torbay	£1,235	Essex	£469
Camden	£1,183	Lincolnshire	£498

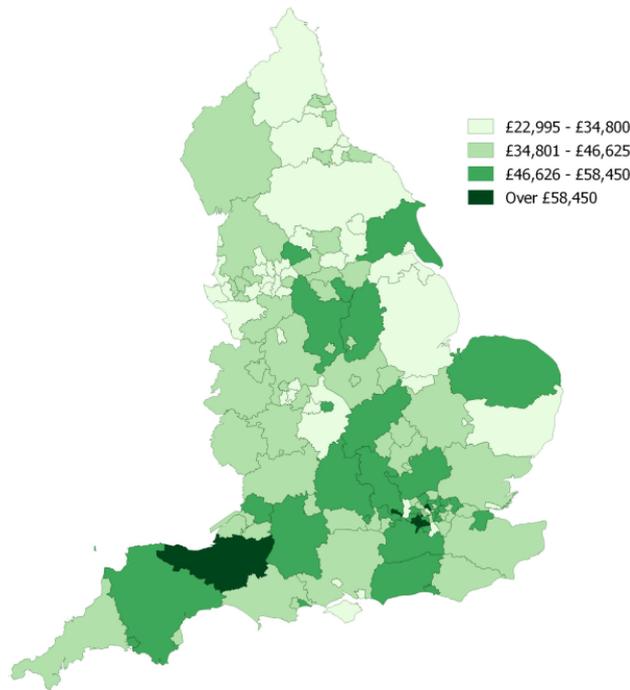
It must be noted that variations in the population of 0-18 year olds will inevitably influence rates of spending. Spending per head figures could be artificially inflated or deflated according to whether an area has a low or high population of 0-18 year olds.

For this reason, perhaps a better indicator of variation in expenditure is spending on looked after children services. Since we know the number of children looked after in a given year we can use this to determine the spend per head in relation to actual service users.

The map below shows that the highest spending authorities in terms of looked after children tend to be concentrated in London areas.

Richmond upon Thames had the highest spend per looked after child in 2017/18 with a figure of £70,256, while Croydon had the lowest spend per head (£22,995).

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SPENDING IN ENGLAND 2017/18: £ per looked after child



### HIGHEST AND LOWEST SPENDING PER LOOKED AFTER CHILD

Five highest		Five lowest	
Richmond upon Thames	£70,256	Croydon	£22,995
Camden	£67,918	Oldham	£25,473
Slough	£62,004	Solihull	£25,874
Merton	£61,296	York	£27,183
Kingston upon Thames	£60,582	Lincolnshire	£27,887

Variations in spend per head are likely to be due to several factors. The number of children supported in specialist placements and residential settings (which tend to be more costly), area based cost pressures and competing demands with other non ring-fenced funding areas will all impact on expenditure. Research has also suggested that inconsistent local authority financial returns make it difficult to compare the cost of delivering services in different areas.<sup>42</sup>

The National Audit Office has found that there is no link between local authority spend per child in need and the quality of services as assessed by Ofsted.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Local Government Association, *Making Sense*, Newton Europe, July 2018

<sup>43</sup> National Audit Office, *Pressures on children's social care*, HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 14

### 3.3 Funding pressures

The increase in demand for children's social care services, combined with reductions in grant funding from central government and increases in care costs,<sup>44</sup> has increasingly put local authorities' finances and services under pressure.<sup>45</sup> According to the Local Government Association, spending on children's social care has increased at a faster rate than any other area of council business.<sup>46</sup>

The [State of Local Government Finance Survey 2019](#), conducted by the LGiU and The MJ, found that Children's Services and Education was the top *immediate* financial pressure for local authorities for the second year running.<sup>47</sup>

Authorities identified the following as the top sources of pressure on their children's social care services:

- more families with complex support needs (59%).
- more children being taken into care (57%).
- special educational needs and disabilities (52%).
- increasing cost of providing residential care (49%).
- social worker recruitment and retention (43%).
- more referrals about child safety concerns (38%).
- lack of foster carers and adoptive parents (35%).<sup>48</sup>

According to the National Audit Office (NAO), the proportion of local authorities that have overspent on children's social care has increased from 63% in 2010/11 to 91% in 2017/18. The total overspend on children's social care across all local authorities in 2017/18 was £872 million.<sup>49</sup> Overspends impact on the funding available to other local services as well as local authorities' overall financial sustainability.

The NAO report on [Pressures on children's social care](#) (January 2019) provides a more detailed analysis of the financial pressures facing local authorities.

9 out of 10 local authorities spent more than they had planned to on children's social care in 2017/18. The total overspend was £872 million.

<sup>44</sup> For example, from the increasing use, and high cost, of residential care places.

<sup>45</sup> An analysis of local authority financial pressures are provided in the following reports: National Audit Office, [Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018](#), HC 834, 8 March 2018 and House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, [Financial sustainability of local authorities- Fiftieth Report of Session 2017–19](#), HC 970, 4 July 2018

<sup>46</sup> Local Government Association, [Written evidence submitted to the Public Account Committee - Transforming children's services inquiry](#), CSR001, January 2019

<sup>47</sup> [LGiU MJ State of Local Government Finance Survey 2019](#), 14 February 2019, p14

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 15

### 3.4 Reduced spending on preventative services

As noted in section 3.1, in recent years local authorities have generally protected funding for children's social care services by reducing spending in other service areas or by using their reserves.

However, there is evidence that funding for non-statutory children's services, in particular for early and preventative interventions such as children's centres and youth services, has been significantly reduced in many areas.

According to the National Audit Office, the proportion of local authority spending on preventative children's services (as a percentage of overall spending on children's services) fell from 41% in 2010/11 to 25% in 2017/18. Whilst the proportion of spending on statutory social care activities rose from 59% to 75% over the same period.<sup>50</sup> Analysis by leading children's charities found that local authority spending on early intervention services (children's centres, family support services and services for young people) fell by 49% between 2010/11 and 2017/18.<sup>51</sup>

The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, raised concerns about the impacts of cuts to preventative services in a 2018 report on public spending on children:

The work shows, therefore, that spend on children has in fact been overall broadly resilient over the last 20 years, even taking into account the effects of the 2008 recession. Within that overall figure, however, are some worrying trends. Mainstream and acute services such as age 4-16 education and provision for children in care have been protected at the expense of targeted preventative services, removing vital safety nets for some very vulnerable children. The 60% cut in Sure Start and youth services will see an increasing number of vulnerable children fall through the gaps.

England now spends nearly half of its entire children's services budget on 73,000 children in the care system – leaving the other half for the remaining 11.7 million kids.

Children do not arrive in extreme need overnight and many could be prevented from getting to that point if we helped them sooner in a more effective way. We are, in effect, attempting to manage and contain crisis in children's lives after allowing it to escalate.

The economic and social costs are unsustainable. The cost to the state will ultimately be greater, but it is the lifetime cost to these children which we should be most troubled by. They only have one childhood, one chance to grow up. Already we see the costs of helping children later in life, or of allowing greater numbers to become marginalised – in the current pressures on family courts, special schools and the care system; in spiralling numbers of

Overall, whilst local authorities have protected funding for children's social care, they have significantly reduced spending on early intervention and preventative children's services.

<sup>50</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 2.21

<sup>51</sup> Action for Children, the National Children's Bureau, NSPCC, the Children's Society and Barnardo's, [Children and young people's services: Funding and spending 2010/11 to 2017/18](#), February 2019, p12

school exclusions and the consequent increase in younger and younger children linked to violent street gangs.<sup>52</sup>

The value of early intervention is reflected in the DfE statutory guidance [Working together to safeguard children](#) (last updated 1 August 2018), which is clear that providing early help is more effective in promoting children's welfare than reacting later and that it plays an important part in supporting children and young people to achieve better outcomes.<sup>53</sup>

In a parliamentary debate on the Care Crisis Review on 5 September 2018, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, outlined Government action on early intervention and rejected calls to ring-fence funding for preventative services:

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford has an interest in early intervention. I assure her that, across Government, we are addressing the root causes of children's needs early - be it by supporting children with alcohol-dependent parents or in families affected by domestic abuse, preventing young people from being drawn into serious violence, or investing in early years and children's and young people's mental health. Our "Working Together to Safeguard Children" statutory guidance is clear that local areas should have a comprehensive range of effective evidence-based services in place to address assessed needs early. The Government have also committed £920 million to the troubled families programme, which aims to achieve significant and sustained improvement for up to 400,000 families with multiple high-cost problems by 2020.

On the point that my hon. Friend made on funding for preventive support services, it is for local authorities to determine how to spend their non-ring-fenced income on the services they provide, including services for preventive support measures.<sup>54</sup>

The Government has rejected calls to ring-fence funding for preventative and early intervention children's services.

### 3.5 Thresholds for support and intervention

A further concern is whether funding constraints are impacting local authority decisions about whether or not to provide support to children and families. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children's 2018 inquiry into children's social care concluded that social workers' decision-making was being influenced by lack of sufficient resources:

Evidence received by the Inquiry indicates that funding is influencing, at least implicitly, social workers' decisions about whether to intervene to support a child. These pressures apply more consistently to decisions about early help and preventative services. However, the APPGC was very concerned to hear from social workers and researchers that decisions about whether to take action to safeguard a child – for example taking a child into care or making a child subject to a child protection plan - have also been affected by funding constraints.

<sup>52</sup> Children's Commissioner for England, [Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies - Elaine Kelly, Tom Lee, Luke Sibieta and Tom Waters, June 2018, pp2-3

<sup>53</sup> [PO 232982 \[Children: Social Services\], 25 March 2019](#)

<sup>54</sup> [HC Deb 5 September 2018 c154W](#)

It is unacceptable that children's safety is potentially being undermined by a lack of sufficient resources.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.6 Funding sustainability

Commentators are concerned that the current levels of funding are not sustainable. The Local Government Association's (LGA) [Budget Submission Autumn 2017](#) asserted that "**Children's social care in particular is becoming the biggest area of financial challenge for social care authorities**".<sup>56</sup>

In November 2017, the LGA wrote a [joint letter](#) with Barnardo's, Action for Children, the Children's Society and National Children's Bureau calling on the Government to close the children's services funding gap.<sup>57</sup>

The LGA's [Budget Submission Autumn 2018](#) estimated that children's services will face a **£1.1 billion funding gap in 2019/20 and a funding gap of around £3 billion<sup>58</sup> by 2024/25:**

The LGA's Bright Futures campaign has warned for some time that the current situation facing children's services is unsustainable. Children's services are being pushed to the brink by growing demand for support and face a funding gap of over £1.1 billion in 2019/20 just to maintain current service levels.

Last year saw the biggest annual increase in children in care since 2010, and councils are now starting more than 500 child protection investigations every day, on average. Councils spent £8.8 billion on children's social care in 2017/18, an increase of 4.3 per cent (nearly £370 million) on the previous year. This is a higher increase proportionally than any other area of council spending. Looked-after children is the single biggest pressure on children's social care, and accounts for 47 per cent (£4 billion) of overall spending on children's services.

Vital care and support for vulnerable children is fast approaching a tipping point, after latest figures showed councils overspent by more than £800 million (10 per cent) on children's social care in the last year.

[...]

The Government urgently needs to:

- **Commit to fully funding the £1.1 billion funding gap in children's services in 2019/20 so that councils can manage the rising demand for help**, while also providing the additional resources they need to support families before problems escalate to the point where a child might need to come into care.<sup>59</sup>

The Local Government Association estimates that children's social care services will face a funding gap of £1.1 billion in 2019/20 and a gap of £3.1 billion by 2025.

<sup>55</sup> The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children, [Storing Up Trouble: a postcode lottery of children's social care](#), July 2018, p6

<sup>56</sup> Local Government Association, [LGA Budget Submission Autumn 2017](#), November 2017, p4

<sup>57</sup> Local Government Association, [A joint letter to Government - Close the children's services funding gap](#), 15 November 2017

<sup>58</sup> The LGA has subsequently estimated a funding gap of £3.1 billion by 2025. See for example: '[Children's care cash crisis: nine in 10 councils pushed into the red](#)', LGA Press Release, 8 January 2019

<sup>59</sup> Local Government Association, [LGA Autumn Budget Submission to HM Treasury](#), September 2018, pp11-12

The LGA has called on the Government to use the 2019 Spending Review to deliver “truly sustainable funding” for local government.<sup>60</sup>

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee’s inquiry into [Transforming children’s services](#) concluded that “the sector is not sustainable” and “it is imperative that the Department [for Education] get to grips with its understanding of demand pressures if it is to make a compelling case for adequate resources in the anticipated spending review”.<sup>61</sup>

Following its [inquiry into Funding of local authorities’ children’s services](#), the House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee concluded:

The 2019 Spending Review settlement must reflect the increased demand and pressures on local authorities’ children’s services; the Government should bridge the existing funding gap for local authority children’s services. At a minimum, un-ringfenced core grant funding up until 2025 should increase by £3.1 billion in total.<sup>62</sup>

The Department for Education has confirmed that it is working with the sector, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and with HM Treasury, as part of the preparation for the Spending Review, to understand the level of funding local government needs to meet demand and deliver statutory duties.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Local Government Association, [The 2019/20 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement](#), 10 January 2019

<sup>61</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, [Transforming Children’s Services – Eighty-Eighth Report of Session 2017-19](#), HC 1741, 22 March 2019, Summary, p3

<sup>62</sup> House of Commons HCLG Committee, [Funding of local authorities’ children’s services: Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19](#), HC 1638, 1 May 2019, Summary, p3

<sup>63</sup> [PQ 254773 22 May 2019](#)

## 4. Variation between local authorities

As demonstrated in previous sections of this paper (see sections 2.1, 2.4, and 3.2) there is considerable variation between local authorities in the activity and cost of children's social care.

There is limited understanding of why there is such wide variation in demand, although the Government recognises that deprivation is one contributory factor:

...There are a range of factors that contribute to trends in demand for children's social care including deprivation in different local authorities. The most deprived local authorities have more looked-after children (per 10,000 0 to 17-year-olds), and these rates have grown faster than the least deprived local authorities. The most common factors that present themselves in children's social care assessments are domestic abuse and mental health...<sup>64</sup>

There is limited understanding as to why the activity and cost of children's social care varies considerably between local authorities.

A number of studies have highlighted the correlation between deprivation and children's social care activity. For example, research by the Child Welfare Inequalities Project (CWIP), funded by the Nuffield Foundation, found that children in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods in England were over ten times more likely to be looked after or on a child protection plan than children in the least deprived 10%.<sup>65</sup>

The National Audit Office (NAO) carried out a statistical analysis of the number of child protection plans per local authority in an attempt to identify drivers of demand and variations in activity in children's social care. The NAO identified three key variables that it considers may explain variation in demand between local authority areas:

Analysis by the National Audit Office identified three key variables that may explain variation in demand for children's social care: local authority 'fixed effects'; deprivation; and 'time effects'.

- **Local authority 'fixed effects'** – these are features which are unique to each authority and will include: custom and practice in children's social care; local market conditions; geographical peculiarities distinct to a particular local authority; characteristics of children and their families within the local authority; historical patterns of demand for children's social care; community composition; and historical funding. According to the NAO, these 'fixed effects' may account for 50% of variation between local authorities over time.
- **Deprivation** – may account for 15% of variation in demand and activity between local authorities.
- **'Time effects'** – these affect all local authorities at the same time, albeit to different extents. Examples include: the introduction of government policy changes; and shocks to the overall child social

<sup>64</sup> [PQ 218759 \[Children: Merseyside\], 13 February 2019](#)

<sup>65</sup> Child Welfare Inequalities Project, [Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries. Briefing Paper 1: England](#), Bywaters, P. et al, February 2017

care system, such as a high-profile child death. 'Time effects' may account for 10% of variation between local authorities.

- **25% of the variation remained unexplained by the NAO statistical model.**<sup>66</sup>

However, this analysis has been criticised for failing to recognise the complexity of children's services, in particular, that local authority intervention rates reflect a balance of demand and supply factors.<sup>67</sup>

Some variation in children's social care activity between local authorities is to be expected. Local authorities have the autonomy to set their own protocols and thresholds for working with children referred to their social care (although protocols must be consistent with legislation and the DfE statutory guidance on [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) (2018)). Whether thresholds are set appropriately and are well understood is inspected by Ofsted and factored into their independent judgements on the quality of services locally.<sup>68</sup>

However, some commentators are concerned about the extent of variation between local authorities' social care activity.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Children's 2018 inquiry into children's social care concluded that a "postcode lottery" existed whereby children with similar needs, and those facing similar risks, were receiving different levels of local authority support and intervention depending on where they live:

The level of need a child has to reach in order to access support was found to vary across the country. Inconsistency appears to be particularly stark in relation to the provision of early help and wider preventative services.

More than 80 per cent of Directors of Children's Services, surveyed as part of the Inquiry, said that there were variations in thresholds for accessing early help. Almost three quarters reported variable thresholds for 'children in need' support, and almost two thirds said there was variation in thresholds for making a child subject to a child protection plan.

Analysis of Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) 'threshold documents' found some significant disparities in how local areas were addressing need, particularly in response to children who are self harming, families with housing problems and even children experiencing physical abuse. These findings suggest that children with similar needs, and those facing similar risks, are receiving different levels of intervention and support depending on where they live.<sup>69</sup>

The APPG recommended that the DfE "should urgently respond to emerging evidence about variation in thresholds and their application

An inquiry by the APPG for Children concluded that vulnerable children and families face a "postcode lottery" in the levels of social care support and intervention provided by local authorities.

<sup>66</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, paras 3.12-3.14

<sup>67</sup> HoC Public Accounts Committee Transforming Children's Services Inquiry, [Written evidence submitted by Professor Paul Bywaters, Centre for Applied Childhood, Youth and Family Research, University of Huddersfield, CSR009](#), February 2019

<sup>68</sup> [PQ 216267 \[Social Services: Children\]](#), 7 February 2019

<sup>69</sup> The APPG for Children, [Storing Up Trouble: a postcode lottery of children's social care](#), July 2018, p4

across children's social care departments, and the implications for children and families".<sup>70</sup>

The [Government's response](#) to the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee's report on Transforming Children's Services outlined DfE work underway to improve understanding of variation in the activity and cost of children's social care across local authorities:

- it has commissioned a report by the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford. This will set out findings from research that explores the reasons for variation in the costs of providing children's social care services;
- it is considering the best approach and method for calculating up-to-date statistical neighbours. This will allow LAs to identify a closer, more appropriate LA against whom to compare service performance; and
- it is considering ways to present better data within the LAIT [Local Authority Interactive Tool]. The recent *adoption scorecards* illustrate the potential for making data more easily accessible to LA leaders and practitioners;
- it is also using data to target the delivery of key programmes. For example, the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme will provide funding to up to 20 councils to help improve their practice, supporting families to stay together wherever appropriate, so that fewer children need to be taken into care and giving them the best chance to succeed in life.<sup>71</sup>

## 4.1 Improving understanding of pressures on children's services

The National Audit Office (NAO) criticised the Government in 2016,<sup>72</sup> and again in 2019, for failing to fully understand what is driving demand for children's social care or why there is such wide variation between local authorities in their children's social care activity and costs.<sup>73</sup>

In late 2017 the Government commissioned external research into the relative drivers of 'need to spend' on children's services in order to:

- develop a statistically robust, up-to-date approach to funding distribution for children's services at local government finance settlements; and
- gather data to better understand demand pressures.<sup>74</sup>

The Government has commissioned external research to improve its understanding of the relative drivers of 'need to spend' on children's services.

<sup>70</sup> The APPG for Children, [Storing Up Trouble: a postcode lottery of children's social care](#), July 2018, p4

<sup>71</sup> HM Treasury, [Government response to the Committee of Public Accounts on the Eighty-Eighth Report of Session 2017-19](#), CP 113, 10 June 2019, para 1.2

<sup>72</sup> National Audit Office, [Children in need of help or protection](#), HC 723, 12 October 2016

<sup>73</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 18

<sup>74</sup> [PQ 215198 \[Children: Social Services\], 5 February 2019](#)

This work is expected to be finished by summer 2019.<sup>75</sup>

The DfE has also confirmed that, in preparation for the 2019 Spending Review, it is working with the sector to “develop a sharper and more granular picture of demand for children’s services”.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> National Audit Office, *Pressures on children’s social care*, HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 3.5

<sup>76</sup> [PQ 202747 \[Social Services: Children\], 20 December 2018](#)

## 5. Standards of social care

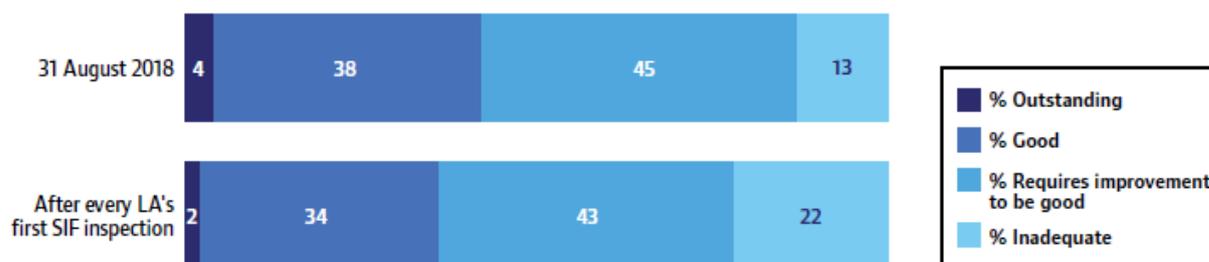
The independent inspectorate, Ofsted, is responsible for the formal assessment of local authorities' children's social care services. Information about [How Ofsted inspects children's social care](#) is available on the Ofsted website.

Up until the end of 2017 inspections were carried out under the single inspection framework (SIF). From 2018, Ofsted has used a new framework for the [inspection of local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#) which is intended to support the earlier identification of risk and success.<sup>77</sup> The ILACS system comprises the following:

- standard inspections (usually for local authorities judged 'requires improvement to be good').
- short inspections (for local authorities judged 'good' or 'outstanding').
- focused visits.
- monitoring visits.
- activity outside inspection.

The [Ofsted Annual Report 2017/18: education, children's services and skills](#) reported that "**Nationally, the overall effectiveness of local authorities' children's services continues to improve.** When looking at the latest national picture compared with the picture after each local authority's first SIF inspection, the proportion judged good or outstanding has improved from 36% to 42%. There has been a decrease in the proportion judged inadequate, from 22% to 13%".<sup>78</sup>

**Figure 30: Overall effectiveness of local authorities at their most recent inspection, at various points in time**



1. Includes inspections carried out by 31 August 2018 that had a report published by 30 September 2018.

2. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100. Where the number of inspections is small, percentages should be treated with caution.

Source: Ofsted

As at 31 August 2018, 58% of local authorities were rated as either "requires improvement to be good" or "inadequate". The Ofsted 2017/18 report is clear that **whilst children's services are improving overall, this is not the case everywhere:**

Some LAs that fail in a relatively small number of judgement areas have the capacity, with the right level of support and challenge, to turn things around relatively quickly. Then there are those LAs

<sup>77</sup> For further information see: '[A new inspection system](#)', *Ofsted blog*, 9 November 2017

<sup>78</sup> Ofsted, [Ofsted Annual Report 2017/18: education, children's services and skills](#), 4 December 2018, para 223

that require longer and more significant intervention, but still achieve impressive improvement. Finally, there are those LAs in which the weaknesses are so great and the infrastructure insufficient that the inadequacy is far more entrenched. These are the LAs that take the longest time to improve and help fuel the public perception of poor performing LAs.<sup>79</sup>

Common features of local authorities that struggle to improve from inadequate are:

- a failure to address longstanding weakness and their general pace of improvement.
- insufficient staff and managers, including failures to recruit and retain them and the resultant high caseloads.
- the quality of social work practice, including failures to identify risk and delay in both protecting and achieving permanent alternatives for children.
- a lack of purposeful management oversight of practice.<sup>80</sup>

The Department for Education is responsible for intervening in services that Ofsted judges inadequate. As of 10 December 2018, the Department was intervening and directly working with 21 local authorities on this basis.<sup>81</sup> The Department has a target to have less than 10% of local authorities deemed 'inadequate' by 2022.<sup>82</sup>

Social care providers in England have also continued to improve over the years. In 2017/18, 84% of the almost 3,000 social care providers were judged good or outstanding by Ofsted. 14% required improvement to be good and 2% were inadequate.<sup>83</sup>

As at 10 December 2018, the Department for Education was intervening and directly working with 21 local authorities whose children's services had been judged inadequate by Ofsted.

## 5.1 Public Accounts Committee inquiry 2017-19

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee's [report on its inquiry on Transforming children's services](#) (March 2019) was critical of the DfE's clack of clarity on what sustainable improvement it seeks to achieve for children's social care. The Committee recommended that:

The Department should write to us setting out the quality of children's social care it is seeking to achieve by 2022 and how it will measure this. It should specify a percentage target for how many authorities it is aiming to be rated as "Good" or "Outstanding" by 2022. It should do this in a fuller letter accompanying the Treasury Minute response to our report.<sup>84</sup>

In its response to the Committee, the Government agreed to write separately to the Committee about this recommendation, noting that the extent of DfE's ambitions for 2022 will depend on the outcome of

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., para 225

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., para 230

<sup>81</sup> National Audit Office, [Pressures on children's social care](#), HC 1868, 23 January 2019, para 2.9

<sup>82</sup> [WH Deb 3 April 2019 c407WH](#)

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p93

<sup>84</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, [Transforming Children's Services – Eighty-Eighth Report of Session 2017-19](#), HC 1741, 22 March 2019, recommendation 5, p7

the next Spending Review, both in terms of the local government settlement and the Department's own programme budget.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> HM Treasury, [\*Government response to the Committee of Public Accounts on the Eighty-Eighth Report of Session 2017-19\*](#), CP 113, 10 June 2019, para 5.2

## 6. The social care workforce

There is evidence that many local authorities are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified social workers, with a consequent reliance on more costly agency social workers.

### 6.1 Workforce statistics

Department for Education (DfE) experimental statistics show that as at 30 September 2018 there were 29,470 full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers, an increase of over 3% from the same point in 2017.

The table below summarises statistics for the past two years (changes in data collection procedures prevent reliable comparisons with earlier years).

<b>CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK WORKFORCE SUMMARY STATISTICS</b>			
England: Full Time Equivalents as at 30 September each year			
	2017	2018	% change
Social workers	28,500	29,470	+3.4%
Leavers	3,880	4,490	+15.7%
Joiners	5,570	5,240	-5.9%
Turnover rate	13.6%	15.2%	+11.8%
Staff vacancies	5,820	5,810	-
Vacancy rate	17.0%	16.5%	-2.9%
Agency staff	5,340	5,360	+0.4%
Agency staff rate	15.8%	15.4%	-2.5%

Source: [DFE: Children's social work workforce 2018](#)

In 2018 more social workers left the workforce than in 2017, resulting in a higher turnover rate<sup>86</sup> of 15.2%, compared with 13.6% in 2017.

Staff vacancies remained at a similar level with 5,810 FTE social worker vacancies at September 2018. However, as the FTE workforce numbers increased slightly in 2018, the vacancy rate<sup>87</sup> also fell in comparison to 2017 (down to 16.5% from 17.0%)

A similar picture was observed for agency staff, whereby FTE numbers were relatively similar in 2017 and 2018 but the agency staff rate<sup>88</sup> fell slightly.

<sup>86</sup> The turnover rate is defined as the number of leavers divided by the number of workers in place.

<sup>87</sup> The vacancy rate is defined as the number of FTE vacancies divided by the number of FTE staff in post plus vacant posts.

<sup>88</sup> The agency staff rate is defined as the number of agency staff divided by all FTE staff in post.

## 6.2 Variation between local authority areas

The national figures mask large variations in social worker vacancies and the use of agency staff between local authority areas.

The tables below show the local authority areas with the five highest and lowest rates of vacancies and agency staff use.

As of 30 September 2018, five local authorities reported no child and family social worker vacancies, while five authorities reported rates over 39%. The vacancy rate in Swindon was just under half of the workforce.

<b>HIGHEST AND LOWEST CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKER VACANCY RATE</b>			
England as at 30 September 2018			
Five highest		Five lowest	
Swindon	49.5%	Barnsley	0.0%
Croydon	46.6%	Brighton and Hove	0.0%
Tameside	44.6%	North Lincolnshire	0.0%
Gloucestershire	39.9%	North Yorkshire	0.0%
Lambeth	39.3%	Wigan	0.0%

Source: [DFE: Children's social work workforce 2018](#)

Swindon also had the highest rate of agency staff use with over half of the workers in place in September 2018 being agency staff.

<b>HIGHEST AND LOWEST CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKER AGENCY STAFF RATE</b>			
England as at 30 September 2018			
Five highest		Five lowest	
Swindon	53.8%	Isles of Scilly	0.0%
Reading	46.8%	Leeds	0.5%
Luton	43.3%	Derby	0.7%
Lambeth	40.0%	North Lincolnshire	0.8%
Windsor and Maidenhead	38.3%	Brighton and Hove	0.9%

Source: [DFE: Children's social work workforce 2018](#)

A range of factors can influence recruitment and retention, including: property/rental prices in an area, proximity to London without the incentive of London Weighting on salaries, competition from neighbouring authorities, social worker caseloads and the impact of negative Ofsted inspections.<sup>89</sup>

## 6.3 Initiatives to address workforce challenges

In response to a written parliamentary question in January 2019, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families,

<sup>89</sup> Association of Directors of Children's Services, [Safeguarding Pressures Phase 6 – Main Report](#), 7 November 2018, p89

Nadhim Zahawi, outlined some of the Government's programmes to support the children's social care workforce:

The department is improving the quality of leadership through £2 million for the Local Government Association to provide support to lead members and chief executives, and are increasing our support of directors of children's services. We have an ambitious programme to improve the social work workforce, which underpins transformative children's services. We are also improving the quality of social work initial education through £24 million supporting Teaching Partnerships, and our fast-track entry programmes, Step Up to Social Work and Frontline, which have seen over 1,450 social workers trained. We are investing in professional development with £5 million annually for high quality programmes for those starting as social work practitioners, and over £4 million in total on supervisors and practice leaders...<sup>90</sup>

A report by the Association of Directors of Children's Services – [Safeguarding Pressures \(2018\)](#) - gives examples of initiatives that individual local authorities are putting in place to address recruitment and retention challenges.

Nevertheless, the Local Government Association has called on the Government to work with local government on a national recruitment campaign.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> [PO 203968 \[Children: Social Services\], 8 January 2019](#)

<sup>91</sup> Local Government Association, [Bright Futures - Getting the best for children, young people and families](#), October 2017, p19

## 7. Outcomes for children in need

It is generally acknowledged both that the majority of looked after children experience more positive outcomes than they would have if they were not taken into care, and that children in care often experience better outcomes than those in the wider group of 'children in need'. However, children in care and those leaving care face a variety of lower outcomes compared to their peers:<sup>92</sup>

Figure 1: Challenges facing looked-after children



Source: Department of Education, *Children Looked After in England, 2017; Outcomes for children looked after, 2017*; Bazalgette.L et. Al, 2015

Understanding the routes to and causes of these outcomes is challenging. In particular, it is an area of contention as to whether these outcomes are a necessary result of the circumstances that children in the care system have experienced, or whether the care system could and should do more to alleviate and mitigate these impacts. A recent report by the Social Market Foundation - [Looked-after Children: The Silent Crisis](#) (August 2018) provides further analysis of this issue and recommends a range of actions to ensure improvement.

The Department for Education (DfE) collects and annually publishes information on the educational attainment of looked-after children.<sup>93</sup>

The House of Commons Library briefing paper [CBP08429: Support for care leavers](#) outlines the development of Government policies to support care leavers, and the specific support available to them in terms of: social services; housing; education and training; health services; and the social security system.

The National Audit Office (NAO) report [Children in need of help or protection](#) (October 2016) highlighted that whilst the DfE measured volumes and timeliness of processes, it had no data on outcomes for children in need, except for educational outcomes. The NAO recommended that the DfE should "develop better indicators to monitor the lives and outcomes for children and families who are, or have been, in contact with the child protection system...".<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Social Market Foundation, [Looked-after Children: The Silent Crisis](#) by Matthew Oakley, Guy Miscampbell, Raphael Gregorian, August 2018

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>

<sup>94</sup> National Audit Office, [Children in need of help or protection](#), HC 723, 12 October 2016, Recommendation e, p10

## 7.1 DfE review of support for children in need

In March 2018 the Department for Education (DfE) launched a [Review of support for children in need](#) and started to gather and analyse qualitative and quantitative evidence to help understand what makes a difference to the educational outcomes of children in need, and what is needed to improve those outcomes.

The DfE published its [interim review findings](#)<sup>95</sup> in December 2018 and [three sets of data and analysis](#) during the review.

The review's final publication, [Help, protection, education: concluding the children in need review](#), was published on 17 June 2019.

The evidence showed children in need, on average, have poorer outcomes at every stage of education than their peers. They start behind other children in the early years and have a widening attainment gap throughout school. They are also more likely than other children not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) after age 18.

The review's key findings include:

- at least 1.6 million children needed a social worker at some point between 2012/13 and 2017/18 - equivalent to 1 in 10 of all children.
- in all but 500 schools across England, there are pupils who have needed a social worker at some point between 2012/13 and 2017/18.
- children who have needed a social worker have poorer educational outcomes at every stage of education than those who have not, and taking account of other factors associated with attainment, are up to 50% less likely to achieve a strong pass in English and maths GCSEs.
- children who are living at home with family on a child in need or child protection plan are just as likely to do poorly in education as looked after children.
- beyond school, those who had needed a social worker in the year of GCSEs are less likely to enter higher education at age 18 and by age 21, half of these young people have still not achieved level 2 qualifications (GCSE or equivalent).<sup>96</sup>

In light of the review, the DfE has committed to take action across four areas to address some of the most significant systemic challenges to improving educational outcomes for children in need:

**Visibility:** hidden until now, the review has uncovered the scale of how many children have ever needed a social worker and the lasting consequences for educational outcomes. We will work towards better recognition of this, so that all schools understand the size of their cohort, as well as improving how the information

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<sup>95</sup> DfE, [Improving the educational outcomes of children in need of help and protection: interim findings](#), December 2018

<sup>96</sup> DfE, [Policy paper: Review of children in need](#), updated 17 June 2019

needed to respond effectively is shared between social care and schools.

**Keeping children in education:** children who have needed a social worker are more likely to be out of school despite known risks, when being in education would keep them safer and able to achieve. Children must be supported, by all agencies, to be in school – be it through reducing persistent absence, avoiding children being out of school where safety is a concern, tackling off-rolling, or giving those at risk of exclusion the best chance to succeed.

**Aspiration:** given the very difficult circumstances children face, an instinctive and even well-meaning response can be that they are dealing with enough already and so to expect less of them. Yet given how far these circumstances persist, education must be pursued in parallel to safety. Maintaining high aspiration is what children have told us they want, and brings schools and social care together to share expertise and deliver support which focuses on realising potential.

**Support in and around school:** whilst still developing, we need to share evidence of what works, so that schools can adopt approaches and deliver interventions that are most effective. Given the adversity and traumatic experiences children have faced and their social, emotional and mental health needs, this requires a wider system of specialist support in and around schools.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> DfE, [Help, protection, education: concluding the children in need review](#), 7 June 2019, p12

## 8. Further reading

### 8.1 Stakeholder reports

In recent years a number of reports, from a range of stakeholders, have raised ongoing concerns with children's social care services. A selection of these reports is provided below.

#### **Children and young people's services: funding and spending 2010/11 to 2017/18**

[Joint analysis](#) (February 2019) by Action for Children, the National Children's Bureau, NSPCC, the Children's Society and Barnardo's of trends in funding and spending on children and young people's services, including some regional analysis.

#### **Care Crisis Review: Options for Change**

[Care Crisis Review](#) - A sector-led seven month review of the rise in applications for care orders and the number of children in care. The final report - [Care Crisis Review: Options for Change \(June 2018\)](#) - provided an in-depth analysis of the current state of children's social care and set out 20 options for change.<sup>98</sup>

This report was [debated in Parliament](#) and the Commons Library produced a [briefing for the debate](#).

#### **Association of Directors of Children's Services**

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) has collected qualitative and quantitative data from local authorities in six phases spanning 2007/08 to 2017/18 to evidence and better understand changes in demand for, and provision of, children's social care. [Safeguarding Pressures Phase Six - 2018](#), was published in November 2018.

An earlier ADCS position paper - [A Country That Works For All Children](#) (October 2017) - explored the impact of different initiatives and policies on children's lives and outcomes.

#### **Local Government Association**

The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned Newton Europe to examine the drivers of variation in spend on children's services. The report, [Making Sense](#), was published in July 2018.

The LGA paper [Bright Futures – getting the best for children, young people and families](#) (October 2017) sets out seven priorities for coordinated action to help drive the improvement necessary to offer the brightest future for children and families.

#### **The Children's Commissioner for England**

The Children's Commissioner has published a number of relevant reports, including:

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<sup>98</sup> Care Crisis Review, [Care Crisis Review: Options for Change](#), June 2018, pp4-5

- [Vulnerability report](#), Children's Commissioner, July 2018
- [Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020](#), Children's Commissioner and the IFS, June 2018
- [Stability index](#), Children's Commissioner, June 2018
- [Who Cares? Children's Commissioner report on public expectations for the care of vulnerable children](#), Children's Commissioner and Ipsos Mori, May 2018.

## The Children's Society

The Children's Society has published many reports which can be found on their [publications website](#). Major publications include:

- [Crumbling Futures: Why vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds need more support as they move into adulthood](#), March 2018
- [Good Childhood Report 2017](#)

## Action for Children

The charity [Action for Children](#) has published two research reports that raise concerns that opportunities to intervene early are being missed, and "Some children are stuck in a revolving door into social care, in a cycle of referral and assessment, but only receiving help at crisis point": [Revolving Door Part 1](#) (2017) and [Revolving Door Part 2](#) (2018).

## Institute for Government

The Institute for Government's [Performance Tracker 2018](#) (October 2018), written in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, analyses the cost and performance of nine public services, including children's social care.

## Education Policy Institute (EPI)

The EPI publication [Vulnerable children and social care in England: a review of the evidence](#), (April 2018) examines the state of the children's social care system in England – bringing together data on children in need, intervention rates, staffing levels and funding provision.

## 8.2 Parliamentary scrutiny

A number of relevant parliamentary reports have been published in recent years, including the following:

### House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee conducting an inquiry into the [Funding of local authorities' children's services](#) and published its report on 1 May 2019. The Committee awaits the Government's response.

## House of Commons Public Accounts Committee

The Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office (NAO) have reported on children's social care on four occasions in recent years:

### **Transforming children's services**

[PAC report \(22 March 2019\)](#) examines the pressures on children's social care and how the Government plans to achieve its programme of reform by 2022. The [Government's response](#) was published on 10 June 2019.

NAO report – [Pressures on children's social care](#) (January 2019) - examines recent trends in pressures on children's social care and the response of both national and local government. It also sets out their analysis of what is causing variations in children's social care demand and activity between different local authorities.

### **Child protection**

[PAC report \(December 2016\) and Government response \(March 2017\)](#).

NAO report: [Children in need of help or protection](#) (October 2016).

### **Care leavers' transition to adulthood**

[PAC report \(October 2015\) and Government response \(January 2016\)](#)

NAO report: [Care leavers' transitions to adulthood](#) (July 2015).

### **Children in care**

[PAC report \(11 March 2015\)](#)

NAO report: [Children in care](#) (November 2014).

## House of Commons Education Select Committee

The House of Commons Education Select Committee has conducted inquiries into [Fostering](#) (report published December 2017) and [Social Work Reform](#) (report published July 2016).

## All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Children

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Children's report - [No Good Options: Report of the Inquiry into Children's Social Care in England](#) (May 2017) - identified key areas for improvement and made recommendations for change. The APPG published a further report - [Storing Up Trouble: a postcode lottery of children's social care](#) – in July 2018.

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