

Local Government Association (LGA)

Debate on the provision of children's services

House of Commons

12 December 2017



Key messages

- There are a wide range of care options available for children and different placements will work for different children. Adoption may provide a loving and stable home for many children and young people, but it will not be the right option for every child. The majority of looked-after children are cared for through a fostering placement, and a significant proportion of looked-after children will return to their families from care (32 per cent of care leavers in March 2017).
- Councils seek to support children to continue to live with their families where possible through family-based support and early intervention. Over the past decade, the number of children on child protection plans has increased by 83 per cent, compared to an increase of 21 per cent in the number of children in care.
- Helping children and young people to fulfil their potential is a key ambition of all councils, but our children's services are under increasing pressure. Facing a £2 billion funding gap by 2020, demand for these services has also increased dramatically. On average, 90 children entered care every day last year, which also saw the largest annual increase in care numbers since 2010.
- Councils have worked hard to protect budgets for essential child protection services, but funding pressures have led to difficult decisions elsewhere, often leaving children and young people unable to access support until they reach crisis point. Government funding for the Early Intervention Grant has been cut by almost £500 million since 2013. It is projected to drop by a further £183 million by 2020.¹
- Ahead of the Local Government Finance Settlement, we are asking the Government to recognise that if we truly want to get the best for children, the services that change their lives must be properly funded.

Background

The Department for Education's most recent figures show there were 72,670 children in care in England on 31 March 2017.² Of these, 53,420 were cared for in a foster placement, including 8,830 placed with family or friends. 2,520 were placed for adoption, representing 3 per cent of all looked-after children.

There are a wide range of care options available for children and different placements will work for different children. Social workers must always look for the best solution to meet the specific needs of individual children. Although adoption may provide a stable and caring home for many children and young

¹ LGA, *Bright Futures*,

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA_Bright%20Futures%20key%20stats%20and%20summary_November%202017.pdf

² Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, 2014 to 2015*. For further information, please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2014-to-2015>

Briefing

people, the importance of fostering, residential care or special guardianship arrangements should not be downplayed.

A significant proportion of children will return to their families after a period in care, and a range of agencies will work with children and their families to help make this possible. 31,250 children ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2017.³ Of these, 32 per cent (9,980) returned home to live with parents or relatives, while 14 per cent (4,350) were adopted and 11 per cent (3,690) were placed in a special guardianship arrangement.⁴

Funding and the local government finance settlement

With a statutory duty to protect every child in need, councils are rightly committed to providing as much resource as possible to safeguarding and most areas have worked hard to protect funding for front-line child protection services.

Facing a £2 billion funding gap by 2020, demand for these services has also increased dramatically. For example, the number of child protection enquiries undertaken by councils has jumped from 73,800 in 2006/07 to 185,450 in 2016/17, a 151 per cent increase in just ten years.⁵ Councils have worked hard to protect budgets for essential child protection services, but funding pressures have led to difficult decisions elsewhere, leaving children and young people unable to access support until they reach crisis point.

If we truly want to get the best for children, the services that change their lives must be properly funded. The Local Government Association's campaign *Bright Futures* sets out our priorities for coordinated action across the public, community and voluntary sectors, which we believe will help drive the improvement necessary to consistently offer the brightest future for children and families.⁶

Ahead of the Local Government Finance Settlement, we are calling on the Government to:

1. Plug the growing £2 billion funding gap for children's services by 2020: Children's services are absolutely vital for many families, and must be fully funded to ensure vulnerable children get the appropriate support and protection they need.

2. Reverse the cuts to early intervention funding to local councils: Without this funding, councils have found it increasingly difficult to invest in the early help services, such as children's centres and family support, that can prevent children entering the social care system, and help to manage needs within families to avoid them escalating.

3. Share the Department for Education's £300 million budget for improvement and innovation in children's services with councils: Devolving a proportion of this budget to councils would help deliver an enhanced programme of sector-led support for children's services, offering everything from regular 'health checks' and training for lead members and senior officers, to specific support for those councils judged to require improvement.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130323064342/http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/childrenandfamilies/a00195582/dcsf-referrals-assessments-and-children-and-young->

⁶ https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Bright%20Futures%20-%20LGA%20children%27s%20social%20care%20%20point%20plan_15_8_2017.pdf