

Local Government Association Briefing

Supporting children in need into adulthood

House of Commons

6 September 2018



Key messages

- Making sure all children and young people have the bright future they deserve is a key ambition of every council. Councils want all young people to be able to enjoy their lives, reach their full potential and make a good transition to adulthood with good health and wellbeing.
- The positive work of councils in helping our children and young people have the best start in life has been illustrated by the latest Ofsted data on children's social care which shows that, in 2017/18, the proportion of council children's services rated good or outstanding has increasedⁱ. Councils have worked tirelessly to protect children's budgets but the increased demand and resource pressures are putting the system under strain.
- Although local authority spending on children's social care has risen, it is not keeping pace with the increase in demand, which has increased dramatically in recent years. On average, 90 children entered care every day last year.
- Our vision for children's services *Bright Futures*ⁱⁱ highlights the importance of a coordinated action plan across the public, community and voluntary sectors in order to offer the brightest future for children and families. The vision also emphasises the need for a cross-Whitehall approach in supporting children into adulthood.
- The funding gap facing councils' children's services will reach £3 billion by 2025. We are calling for this to be plugged and the cuts to early intervention funding to be reversed. This will help councils continue to deliver high quality services for their residents.

Further information

Bright Futures

We have produced a seven point action plan for coordinated action across the public, community and voluntary sectors, which will help drive the improvement necessary to consistently offer the brightest future for children and families. Taken together, the vision represents an ambitious plan, whilst at the same time recognising the challenges and actions we can take in response. If we want to make sure every child and young person can look forward to a bright future, local and national government must be united in their determination to get the best.

The vision outlines seven principles for effective children and young people's services:

- A stronger focus on outcomes for children
- Consistently strong local leadership
- A culture of continuous improvement
- The right support for children at the right time

Briefing

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- Sustainable funding to help children thrive
- A better understanding of what works for children
- Strengthened morale and support for social workers

We have also published *Bright Futures: Our Vision for Youth Services*. This outlines our aspirations to support councils in providing youth services and provides a starting point to take a fresh look at youth provision, encouraging true collaboration between all providers. It also highlights six key principles of effective youth services to support young people's transition to adulthood:

- Youth-led
- Inclusivity, equality and diversity
- Respect
- Quality, safety and well-being
- Empowerment
- Positivity

Funding children's services

Children's social care is one of the few areas where councils are consistently forced to overspend on their budgets, by £816 million in the last year alone. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the largest overspends are found in reactive services such as looked after children and child protection.

The National Audit Office has found that local government funding has been reduced by 50 per cent in real terms since 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ We have calculated that children's services are facing a funding gap of around £3 billion by 2025, just to maintain their current level. This does not allow for any enhancements in services.

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. The latest revenue spending statistics, published by Ministry for Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) last month, show that overall council spending for 2017/18 was down by £447 million on the previous year.^{iv} At the same time, the figures show there has been an increase in spending on children's social care, (up to £368 million). This shows that councils are increasingly having to divert money from other vital services which keep our communities running to meet an unprecedented surge in services which support our children and young people.

Our analysis shows that government funding for the Early Intervention Grant has been reduced by almost £600 million since 2013, and is projected to decrease by almost £100 million more by 2020. This represents a 40 per cent reduction by the end of the decade.

In contrast, there has been £1.2 billion worth of government investment into the National Citizen Service (NCS) between 2016 and 2020, despite just 12 per cent of eligible teenagers taking part in 2016. While the NCS is a good programme, we believe this should form part of a much wider offer to young people. We are calling on the Government to devolve some of this funding to councils to support youth work that meets the needs of young people locally.

It is also important that councils are supported to make the best use of the resources available to them, however recognising that even those areas that appear to be coping better than their peers are now facing significant pressures in maintaining that position.

Rising demand

The Children's Commissioner has warned that more than two million children in England are growing up in families where there are dangers including domestic violence and parents struggling with alcoholism. Earlier in the year, we highlighted the unprecedented demand that councils' children's services teams are facing:^v

- The number of children subject to child protection enquiries has increase 151 per cent in ten years, from 73,800 in 2006/07 to 185,450 in 2016/17.
- Over the same period, the number of children on child protection plans has increased by more than 23,000.
- 90 children a day entered care in the last year, and councils saw the biggest annual increase of children in care since 2010, reaching a new high of 72,670 in 2016/17.

Social workers, carers and teachers work tirelessly to ensure every child has the best start in life, and councils need the powers and funding to make sure this continues to happen. Maintaining a stable, high quality social care workforce is central to the delivery of effective support for children and families, but recruiting and retaining social workers remains a big challenge for councils across the country.

We are calling on the Government to do more to support councils to help recruit and retain high quality social workers.

Children's mental health

Supporting child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing continues to be a priority for local councils. At least one in 10 children and young people have a diagnosable mental health condition and the unreported figures are likely to be higher. Looked after children are four times more likely to experience mental health issues than their peers. Despite the increasing demand, funding for children's mental health has stagnated and only 6.7 per cent of mental health spending goes to children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

In our response^{vi} to the Government's children and young people's mental health green paper, we highlighted that measures to tackle the crisis in children and young people's mental health are long overdue and we are pleased the Government's response confirmed it is taking steps to address this. Our Bright Futures campaign includes a call to prioritise CAMHS and calls on the Government to properly fund councils' children's services departments. We recommend that Government:

- Releases the promised £1.7 billion for CAMHS to ensure adequate and sustainable funding.
- Improves standards and makes sure funding is spent wisely. This includes strengthening the governance over how funding is spent and recognising the expertise of health and wellbeing boards locally.
- Prioritises prevention and early intervention funding to councils to allow them work with schools to commission independent school based counselling.

Youth work and youth services

A consequence of funding reductions to local authorities has been a decrease in the infrastructure required to support good quality youth work. This can mean that even where there is a significant amount of provision available for young people in an area, this can be provided by a range of organisations including the voluntary sector, housing associations and community groups. A lack of coordination can result in duplication, difficulties for young people and their families in finding out

what is available, and limited training and support for providers. It is also difficult to know the quality of youth services available when there is limited understanding of the full range of provision across sectors.

Improved coordination of services can help to ensure the safety of young people, maximise uptake, and support genuine collaboration between services and providers to deliver joint outcomes. Local authorities are ideally placed to carry out this role, but the funding issues outlined above have forced them to prioritise more urgent child protection work.

Local leadership and vision should ideally operate within a framework established by a clear and ambitious national vision for young people, however there is currently no clear national vision or policy around services for young people, which fall under the remit of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). However, we welcome the recent announcement by the government through the Civil Society Strategy that they will be revising guidance on youth services in light of the context in which councils are currently working, and will work with them on this. We hope that this will also include detail on how the government will support the provision of youth services in light of current funding constraints.

All Whitehall departments – not just DCMS – should be considering the impact of their policies on young people. We are calling on the government to introduce a children and young people impact assessment for all new policies introduced.

ⁱ Ofsted, Children’s social care data 2017/18,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2018/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2017-to-2018-main-findings>

ⁱⁱ Bright Futures, <https://www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures-getting-best-children-young-people-and-families>

ⁱⁱⁱ NAO, Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities,

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/03/Financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018-Summary.pdf>

^{iv} Local authority revenue expenditure and financing statistics:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing>

^v LGA response to Children’s Commissioner report on children in care,

<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-childrens-commissioner-report-children-care>

^{vi} LGA response to Government response on children’s mental health Green Paper,

<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-childrens-mental-health-green-paper-consultation-response>