

Local Government Association (LGA)

Debate on the number of vulnerable children in England

House of Lords

14 December 2017



Key messages

- The Children's Commissioner's report highlights the complexity of issues facing young people and their families. It demonstrates the importance of all agencies at local and national level working together to consider how their policies and practice will impact on children and young people.
- Councils aim to help struggling families at an early stage, before issues become serious. 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.ⁱ
- Keeping children safe and well is one of the most important jobs that councils do, but our children's services are under increasing pressure. Facing a £2 billion funding gap by 2020,ⁱⁱ demand for these services has also increased dramatically. More than 500 child protection investigations took place every day last year, compared to 200 a decade ago.ⁱⁱⁱ On average, 90 children entered care every day last year, which also saw the largest annual increase in care numbers since 2010.^{iv}
- 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.^v
- Measures to tackle the crisis in children and young people's mental health are long overdue and we are pleased the Government is taking steps to address this through the children's mental health Green Paper.^{vi} All children need to be able to access support quickly and easily when they need it.

Background

Family support

Councils seek to support children to continue to live with their families where possible. They do this 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.^{vii} However, 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.^{viii} This is already having a significant impact on the availability of early help.

The Children's Commissioner's report highlights the number of children living in households affected by alcoholism, but public health funding, which pays for vital

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alcohol treatment programmes and other community support, has been cut by more than half a billion pounds by the Government in the last five years.^{ix}

Councils are also housing an extra secondary school's worth of homeless children every month^x as families are increasingly unable to access affordable housing, placing more stress on families who may already be struggling to cope.

Funding for children's services

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, or an increase from 202 to 508 investigations every day.^{xi}

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. Despite protecting budgets as far as possible, 75 per cent of councils last year were forced to overspend by more than half a billion pounds^{xii} to protect children at immediate risk of harm.

If we want to get the best for children, the services that change their lives must be properly funded. The LGA'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.^{xiii}

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

- *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.
- *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.

Children's mental health

There is a crisis facing both children and adults' mental health services. Recent reports including the Care Quality Commission (CQC) review highlights that the crisis remains in this service despite two years of reforms.^{xiv} Analysis of transformation plans indicate that not all the money is getting through to front line service provision and is being used to offset other budget reductions. This coupled with historical underinvestment as well as the reported increase in demand for NHS children and young people's mental health services has led to the current crisis. The profile of the new funding remains at the specialist and acute end, but even the provision for the most in need children remain patchy and unsafe.

The Government's recent Green Paper on children's mental health provision is a step in the right direction, but a root-and-branch overhaul of children's mental health services is needed to develop a system that gives children the support they need when they ask for it.

Councils with their statutory public health responsibilities (including the commissioning for 0-5 services) and their statutory corporate parenting responsibilities (for looked after children) have a key role to play in embedding effective practices across universal and targeted services in local areas.

All children need to be able to access support and we hope that measures in the Green Paper will be extended to all schools. Councils have previously called for an independent counselling service in all schools, as evidence shows that children and young people find it a crucial support, and such a service would reduce overall demand on specialist services.

ⁱ Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Children looked after in England, year ending 31 March 2007*

[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130411084519/https://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/childrenandfamilies/a00195573/dcsf-children-looked-after-in-england-\(including-a](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130411084519/https://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/childrenandfamilies/a00195573/dcsf-children-looked-after-in-england-(including-a)

ⁱⁱ LGA, *Bright Futures* summary

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

ⁱⁱⁱ Councils began 185,450 'section 47 enquiries' during the year ending 31 March 201:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017> For the year ending 31 March 2007, this figure was 73,800:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110906153619/http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000742/sfr28-2007.xls>

^{iv} Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, year ending 31 March 2007*

[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130411084519/https://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/childrenandfamilies/a00195573/dcsf-children-looked-after-in-england-\(including-a](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130411084519/https://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/childrenandfamilies/a00195573/dcsf-children-looked-after-in-england-(including-a)

^v LGA, *Bright Futures* summary

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

^{vi} LGA response to the mental health green paper

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

^{vii} Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, year ending 31 March 2007*

[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130411084519/https://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/childrenandfamilies/a00195573/dcsf-children-looked-after-in-england-\(including-a](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130411084519/https://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/childrenandfamilies/a00195573/dcsf-children-looked-after-in-england-(including-a)

^{viii} LGA, *Bright Futures* summary

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

^{ix} <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/sexual-health-services-tipping-point-warn-councils>

^x Department for Communities and Local Government, *Live tables on homelessness*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

^{xi} Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Child Protection Plans or Child Protection Registers, year ending 31 March 2007*

<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->

^{xii} LGA analysis of DCLG statistics of local authority revenue expenditure

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/localauthority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing>
25 LGA analysis of DCLG statistics of local authority

^{xiii} LGA, *Bright Futures: getting the best for children, young people, and families*

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

^{xiv} Care Quality Commission, *Review of children and young people's mental health services*

<http://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/themed-work/review-children-young-peoples-mental-health-services-phase-one-report>