

changing children's lives

addressing cost and demand
for children's services



About CIPFA

CIPFA, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, is the professional body for people in public finance. Our members and trainees work throughout the public services, in national audit agencies, in major accountancy firms, and in other bodies where public money needs to be effectively and efficiently managed.

About Peopletoo

Peopletoo provide support to organisations across local government and health in the areas of adult social care, children's services, environmental services and infrastructure. Our role is to help organisations 'think differently' to ensure that together, we arrive at the best solution to deal with not only the immediate short-term pressures, but to ensure sustainability for future generations. We create new and innovative solutions for sustainable and improved service delivery, ensuring value for money while using local demographics to support development of effective demand management.

About the author

Mike Bennett is the Director of Public Intelligence, a Fellow of St Andrews University School of Management and a Founder of RCS. Previously he was Managing Director of The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE).

\ foreword

It is widely acknowledged that children's social services are struggling to cope with increased demand, the impact of monitoring for radicalisation and child sexual exploitation, all at a time of constrained resources. However in order to improve matters local authorities need to ensure they have a good understanding of the issues in play. CIPFA and Peopletoo have undertaken to help develop that understanding and raise awareness of the issues underlying the rising level of concern over the resourcing of children's social services.

This analysis of the recent history of the sector which includes an assessment of local authority CFO's perceptions of the areas of greatest concern, potential improvement and efficiency will hopefully kick start that conversation and stimulate thinking about the improvements that can lead to greater productivity and ultimately better improved outcomes.



Maggie Kenny
Chief Executive, Peopletoo



Rob Whiteman,
Chief Executive, CIPFA

financial confidence or concern?

The verdict of the electorate in the 2017 General Election has been interpreted as heralding a loosening of the fiscal strings. Only time will tell. What we can be sure of is how the result has exposed the tensions across the political spectrum – not only across but within parties – over the application of more fiscal constraint.

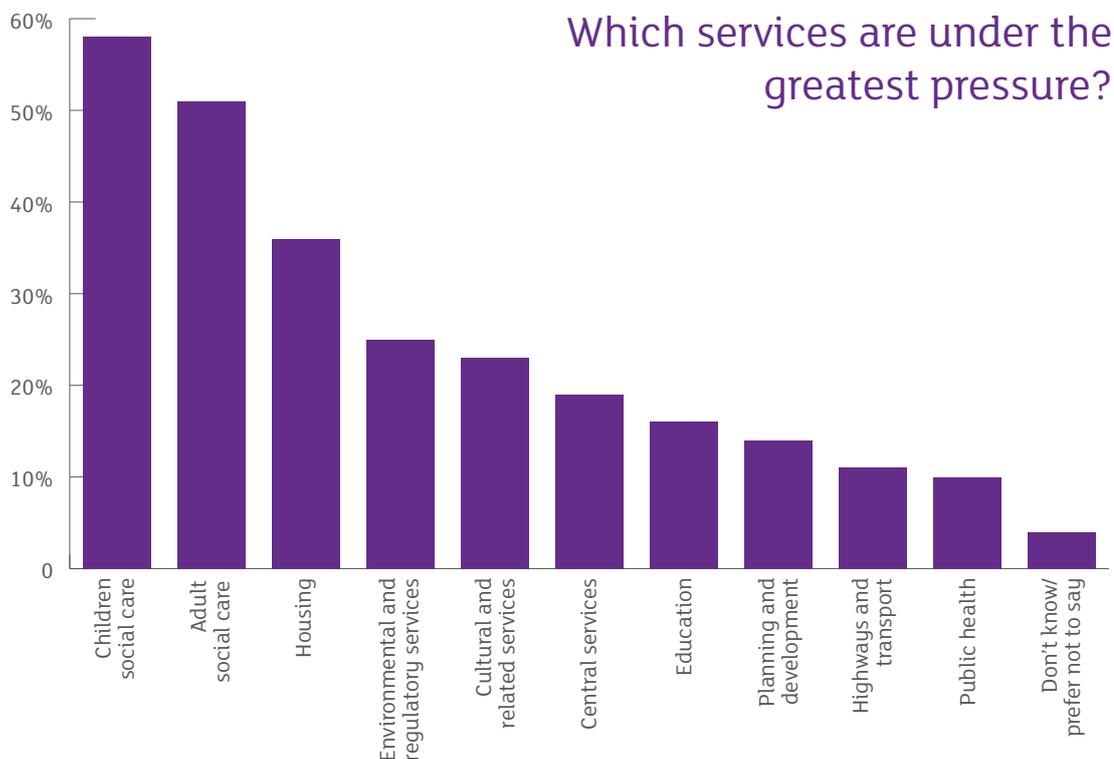
While many see the people’s verdict as calling time on austerity, the bills are already adding up – £1bn loyalty payments for the DUP, £6bn of potential public sector pay pressure, the likely EU ‘exit bill’, not to mention the as yet untold cost of making tower blocks safe throughout the country following the Grenfell tragedy.

Before the election result was known, CIPFA – working with Peopletoo – undertook a snapshot survey of English local authority chief financial officer’s (CFOs) confidence in their authorities’ overall finances and ability to deliver public services.

When asked which services are under the greatest pressure, children’s social care and education were identified as the areas of greatest concern to CFOs.

For four years running in this survey the area of greatest concern has consistently been cited as adult social care, so our assumption is that the newly implemented social care precept, which has enabled authorities to raise an additional £200m per year additional grant and has allayed at least some of the CFO’s current concerns.

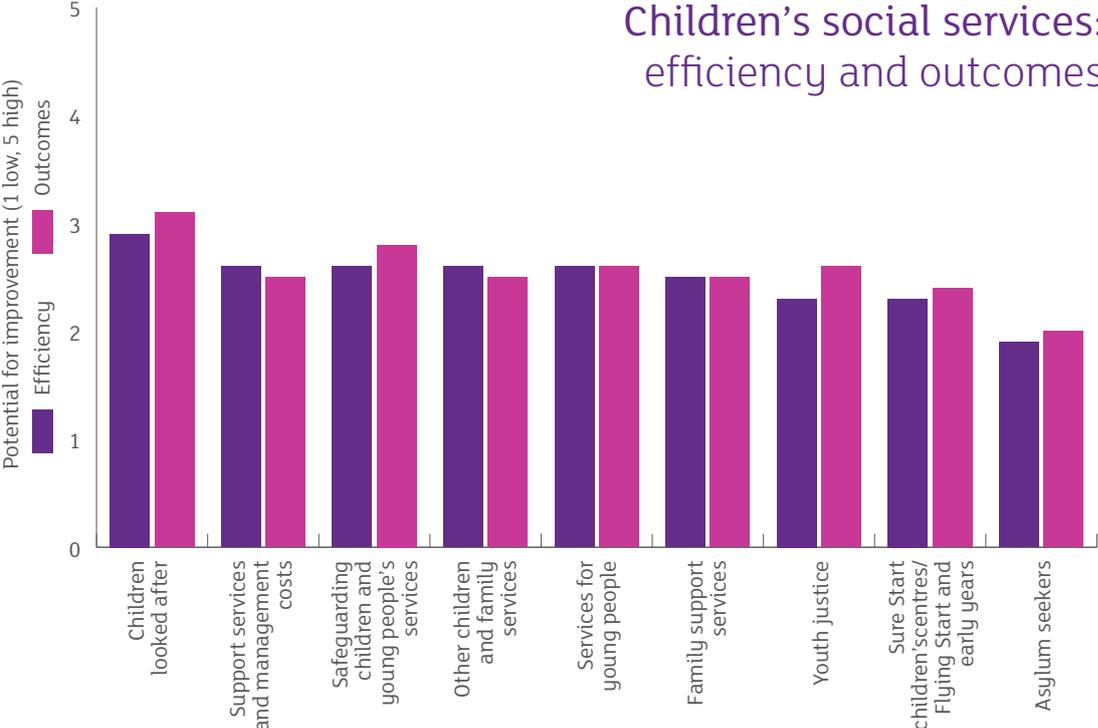
Fig 1



In terms of the areas of children’s services causing most concern, there was a high degree of correlation between those identified as having the greatest challenge in terms of sustainability and those which are perceived as having the greatest potential for improved outcomes and increased efficiency.

Looked after children in particular stands out as the service with the most profound sustainability challenges, but equally is the area identified by respondents as the service as having greatest potential for improvement in outcomes and increased efficiency.

Fig 2



A crisis of confidence?

Against this backdrop it is perhaps unsurprising that CFOs identify children’s social care as the service under the biggest budget pressure in the coming year. Fifty eight percent of respondents to CIPFA’s CFO survey are ‘very concerned’ about the sustainability of expenditure in looked after children and clear majorities ‘fairly concerned’ or ‘very concerned’ about safeguarding, early years, family support and services for young people. Interestingly, CFOs see the greatest potential for efficiencies and outcome improvements are also in the area of looked after children.

Case study

In many of the local authorities that Peopletoo have supported, the management of the cost of looked after children demand has been a key area of opportunity for improvement, and to align financial efficiency with better outcomes for children.

Many authorities experience a pressure on their in house foster care resource and therefore have to commission more independent fostering agency (IFA) placements as a result. Ideally, local authorities would aim for around an 80% / 20% in house to IFA ratio – the examples that Peopletoo have seen range from 70% / 30% to 50% / 50%, to even 30% / 70%. The reasons for this vary – the need for specialist placements that are outside of the in house capabilities, pay rates and levels of support offered compared to neighbouring authorities in a competitive field; even the reputation of a council based on historical performance that can make care assistants harder to attract. If the issue is one more of effective recruitment and retention procedures, the savings from achieving even a small percentage shift in the ratio can be significant, given that the average IFA can be 60% higher than an equivalent in house placement. Peopletoo have modelled savings in a number of authorities ranging from £500k - £1m. This isn't to say that IFAs don't have their place – for specialist provision they are ideally suited to recruiting from a much wider base; it is the commissioning of IFAs for more mainstream placements that drives cost up unnecessarily. To support authorities we have proposed innovative approaches to the recruitment of carers that are based on understanding the motivation of a prospective care assistant – the motivation is rarely financial. In one case we saw a high performing authority undertake

an invest to save approach by commissioning an external specialist marketing agency to undertake the recruitment for them: as a result they were achieving the good practice ratio of 80% in house to 20% IFA.

The other key area in which Peopletoo see authorities managing a key pressure is that of residential care. Through various proposals, each based on the local context, Peopletoo have modelled savings of anything between £1m to £1.5m. After a move away from in house provision to the commissioning of external residential care, some authorities are now considering returning to in house arrangements based on a business case that suggests that this is more cost effective than being driven by the market, and better for the child if it increases the chances of staying within their local area. If an authority is to go down the route of in house provision, care must be taken that the financial model of efficiency is not negated by lack of occupancy, as the overheads are often the same whether they fill a 10 bed home with two children or whether they fill it with 10. One very successful model that Peopletoo have supported is the establishment of a range of two-bed units – small enough to fill appropriately without compromising the differing needs of children with complex needs, and not so large as to risk inoccupancy.

The other way of managing residential cost is to more robustly manage the packages offered by residential providers. In many cases Peopletoo have seen cases reviewed but packages never changing according to changing need. Some cases Peopletoo have seen do not even necessarily need to be in residential care and, with a specialist wrap around package could be supported in a specialist foster placements.

changing children's lives

Children's social care is about changing lives. It has the ability not just to improve the circumstances of vulnerable children, but to transform them completely. So said the Government in 2016, when it set out its vision for the future of children's social care.¹ Indeed since the death of the eight-year old Victoria Climbié in 2000, successive governments have been trying to fix the system and make it fit for this transformative purpose. That case exposed the massive challenges involved in protecting the most vulnerable children. On twelve occasions, over ten months, chances to save Victoria's life were not taken. Social services, the police, and the NHS all missed opportunities to protect her, as Lord Laming's report into Victoria's death made clear. Laming's report and subsequent Every Child Matters legislation fundamentally reformed the local political accountability and service management structures in English authorities.

More recently a mounting concern with issues such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation has added to the critical issues faced by England's children's services.

Together with rising demand and declining resources, it is perhaps unsurprising that a recent survey found that 89 per cent of directors of children's social services reported finding it increasingly challenging to fulfil their statutory duties.²

This paper sets out the strategic context to the development and evolution of children's services and outlines some of the key issues in term of outcomes for children as well as recent policy, resources, and leadership development.

The point of this critical review is not to advocate any particular course of action, but to help understand where we are with children's services and why they are such a concern to CFOs, DCSs and others. We hope together we can begin to raise questions about what must be done to improve outcomes for children and improve confidence among professionals.

The current performance picture

While the children's services workforce are among the highest quality and best motivated public servants anywhere, the uncomfortable truth is that outcomes for children have not radically improved in the years since the creation of children's services. There is no doubt that services have improved in many areas, but unfortunately they have declined in others. And while it is difficult to put together a watertight account because of changes in policy, categorisation, data collection, and the lack of a national performance picture, some of the key figures are telling. When one compares contemporary and historical sources, we can say that while there has been much organisational effort and incredible good will, the impact on children in various forms of need has been limited.

1 *Children's social care reform A vision for change*, 2016, Department for Education, DFE-00008-2016

2 *No good options*, 2017, All Party Parliamentary Group for Children, NCB, London

As a baseline, in 2008 Lord Laming’s Progress Report,³ documented that:

- 37,000 children were subject to care plans
- 60,000 children were looked after
- 29,000 had child protection plans.

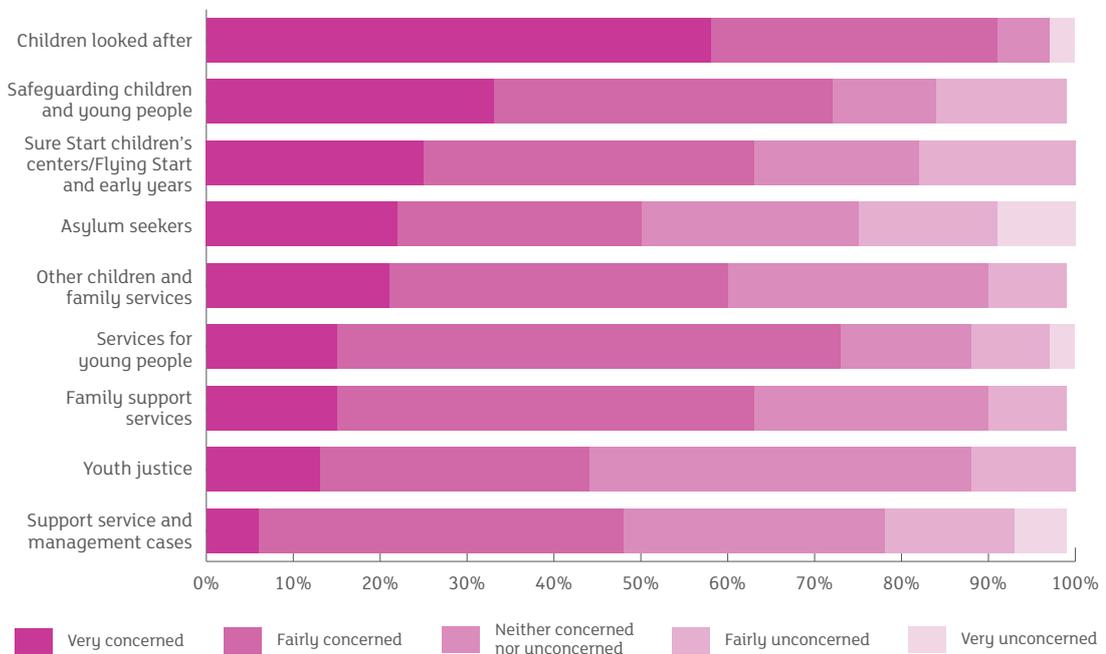
For the year 2015/16, the NSPCC report that:

- 390,000 children received support from children’s services
- 70,000 children were looked after
- 50,000 children had child protection plans.

In CIPFA’s CFO survey respondents reflected the fact that there have been very significant rises in the numbers of children looked after and safeguarding needs, see fig 3.

Fig 3

Children’s social services areas of concern



Furthermore, as in previous years, children under one year are at the highest risk of homicide. In the year ending March 2015 there were 35.8 offences per million of the under one year population. This is almost four times greater than the average rate across the population as a whole which stands at 9.0 offences of homicide per million.⁴

³ *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report by Lord Laming*, 2009, HC 330, The Stationery Office

⁴ *Compendium: Homicide*, Feb 2016, Office of National Statistics

These figures show the number of children receiving services from local authorities has grown considerably over recent years. The number of children looked after had declined dramatically from 1981 to 1994 as children's policy changed and local authorities sought other ways of supporting young people, which did not involve removing them from their home environments.⁵ The recent rise sees England return to levels of children in care not seen since 1984. Even more dramatically, the figures above show that the number of children requiring protection has increased by 72% in 8 years. Evidence from across the UK suggests that this trend is common. All systems show an increasing orientation towards child protection as evidenced by rising rates of child protection investigation and children subject to child protection planning.⁶

We must be careful not to interpret simplistically these high level numbers. There may be several determinants of the rise, other than increased need, such as increased awareness, higher levels of reporting, better recording of the data, and changing view of risk.

Separate analysis shows that the number of referrals has grown massively over the last 20 years.⁷

1991/92 – 160,000 referrals

2008/09 – 547,000 referrals

2013/14 – 657,800 referrals

Nor can we dismiss the possibility that children's services themselves are under so much pressure that they are unable to meet the level of need in their communities.

Another source of information on the performance of children's services lies in Ofsted inspection reports. According to Ofsted⁸, the decline over the last eight years in the inspection performance of local authorities has been dramatic. In 2007/08 69% of councils inspected were considered 'Good', 22% 'Adequate' and 9% 'Outstanding'. Not a single authority inspected was considered 'Inadequate'. In June 2016, 24% councils were rated as 'Inadequate', 49% 'Requiring Improvement' and 26% considered 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

72%

the increase in children with protection plans in 8 years

⁵ Rowlands, J & Statham, J, *Numbers of children looked after in England: a historical analysis*, 2009, Child and Family Social Work, Volume 14, pp 79–89, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00583.x

⁶ Bunting L, McCartan CJ, McGhee J, Bywaters P, Daniel B, Featherstone B & Slater T (2017) Trends in Child Protection across the UK – A Comparative Analysis (Forthcoming), British Journal of Social Work.

⁷ Devine, L & Parker, S, *Rethinking Child Protection Strategy: Learning from Trends*, 2015, University of Bristol and UK Economic and Social Research Council

⁸ *Annual social care report*, 2016, Ofsted



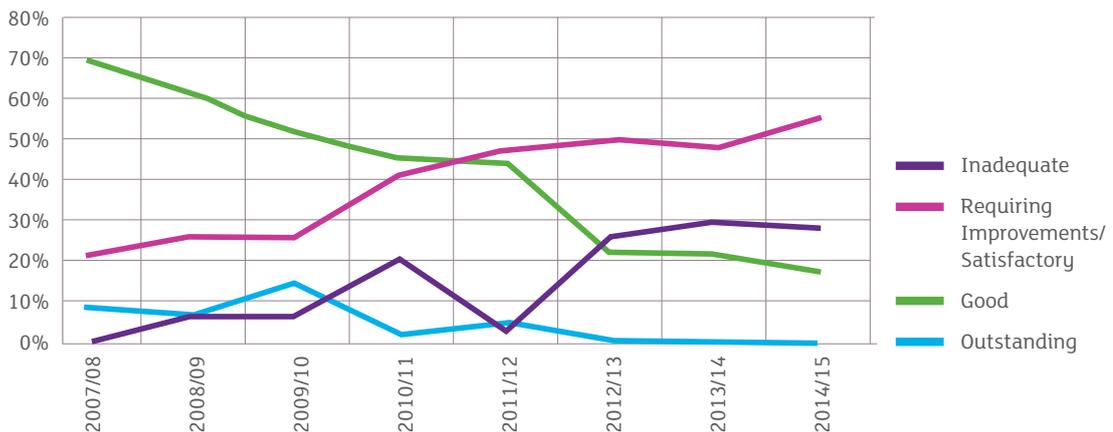
Children's services have been unable to reduce radically the level of need over the last decade



Furthermore, not only has performance declined, analysis published by the LGA/Impower⁹ in 2015, found that many children's services judged inadequate were then unable to turn their performance around. They note, "Of the 86 councils inspected twice or more since 2010, approximately 25% of those rated as inadequate in 2010 remained inadequate over the five year period, and 56% of those requiring improvement/considered satisfactory in 2010 has failed to improve that rating on re-inspection."

Fig 4

Percentage of Ofsted inspection grades given per year



Source: LGA/Impower

Ofsted's data, taken together with the local government's own data on the level of professionally assessed risk among the children's population, we can conclude that children's services have been unable to reduce radically the level of need over the last decade, although quality of service and level of demand are also factors that must be considered.

⁹ *Brave New World: Is Inspection Improving Children's Services?* 2015, LGA/Impower

the leadership inheritance

Underlying Ofsted's approach to inspection is a theory of change which contends that improvement in services does not depend simply on the skill of service managers and commitment of frontline staff. It also requires effective leadership and performance management at the corporate level.¹⁰

It was Lord Laming's 2003 report into Victoria's death that in many ways shaped the future structures and the policy framework of children's services in England. While many of Laming's recommendations were not implemented (notably those relating to the creation of a National Agency for Children and Families reporting both to the Children's Minister and directly to Parliament), it was his report that convinced ministers to fundamentally reform local authority leadership structures. Subsequent legislation required the creation of lead members for children's services and directors of children's services, combining education and social services responsibilities.

While the aim of these changes was to create a stronger focus on children, through integration of education and social services, some worried that the changes were too big and too small. On the one hand, the Government's changes to service leadership created roles of such scope and span that chief executives, experienced recruiters, and others asked how the sector could hope to source the right supply of the right people for these super-jobs.

On the other hand, while the scope of the DCS role created concerns, ironically it was still too narrow. The quality of life that children experience is not only a matter of 'services to children'. It is much more holistic than that. It is the sum total of a community's dynamism, a locality's human relations, its social capital. The DCS would still need to work in partnership with schools, health, the police, and others. The change eliminated just one boundary among many, leaving many to question its effectiveness.

Furthermore, the integration led to a loss of critical senior expertise in social care. As Ray Jones¹¹ wrote: "At a stroke, the top management competence in child protection and care services was largely lost, with 80% of councils appointing former teachers and education managers as children's directors.



Improvement requires effective leadership and performance management



10 Downe J et al, 2007, *Comparing for Improvement*, SFI

11 Professor Jones is a research professor and registered social worker. For 14 years he was a director of social services, and was the first Chief Executive of the Social Care Institute for Excellence. He has also been chair of the British Association of Social Workers and is now the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Chair of the Safeguarding Children Improvement Board for two major English cities. He is the author of five books on social work and social policy and numerous published papers.

So, whereas the 1989 act led to greater specialisation and competence in the care and protection of children, the 2004 act has undermined the experience and expertise that has been developed.”¹²

While government policy has evolved over time, it has been built on the basis of Lord Laming’s Inquiry and the subsequent Every Child Matters Reform. And regardless of the recent return to the old structure of Every Child Matters, this paper forms part of our critical review of recent policy and to note that it is these structural changes that have shaped the organisational landscape in which children’s services have developed over the past 14 years.

Child sexual exploitation

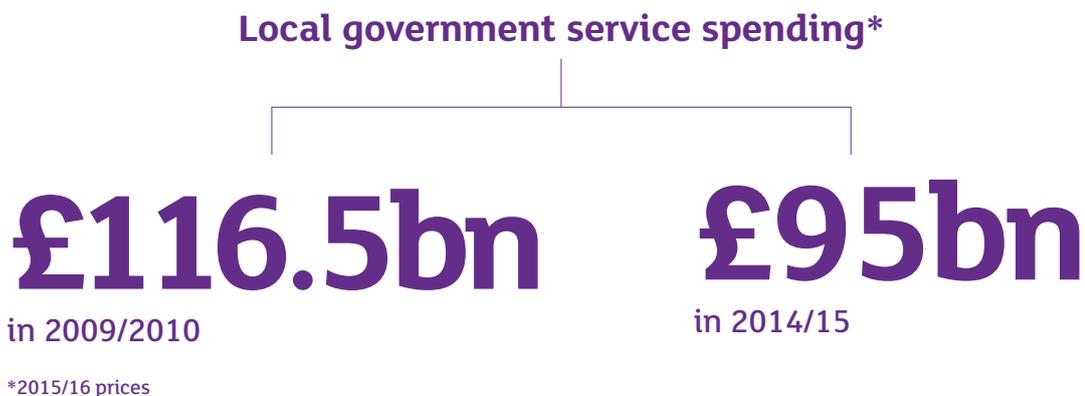
Issues of rising demand, shrinking resources and complex leadership structures have been apparent for years. Child sexual exploitation, however, has only recently been understood as the major issue it is.

As the NSPCC say, child sexual exploitation is a hidden crime. Young people often trust their abuser and don’t understand that they are being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what’s happening. It has existed in British society for decades, yet was rarely discussed as a mainstream issue of social policy. Google Trends data shows that interest began to grow in March 2013 with peak interest in being reached in March and April 2015. Since then interest has remained high, between 50-75% of the peak. The spike in interest of course followed the publication of Dame Louise Casey’s inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

Louise Casey was appointed by the then Secretary of State following the publication by Professor Alexis Jay of an Independent Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. Jay’s report had concluded that over 1,400 children had been sexually exploited in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013.

Casey’s inspection revealed further failures to accept, understand and combat the issue of child sexual exploitation, resulting in a lack of support for victims and insufficient action against known perpetrators.

An Inquiry by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner into child sexual exploitation found that a total of 2,409 children were known to be victims of gangs and groups between August 2010 and October 2011. The LGA says that: “It is generally agreed that these figures are an under-estimate.”¹³



¹² Ray Jones, *Second thoughts*, *Joe Public Blog*, Guardian, Wednesday 11 November 2009

¹³ *Tackling child sexual exploitation*, 2014, LGA

As the Independent Inquiry into Sexual Abuse undertakes its investigations, there will undoubtedly be lessons to draw for local authorities in the delivery of future children’s services. This is likely to uncover as yet unassessed need that local authorities will be required to meet.

Resources

This complex picture of challenging performance and rising and changing demand, of course, exists against a backdrop of austerity. The global crash of 2008, the bank bail outs, and the subsequent long recession led governments to impose strict spending reductions on local government. Writing in 2009, CIPFA and SOLACE observed that “Leaders of all of the major political parties have acknowledged that cuts are unavoidable” when setting out the consequences of alternative scenarios, depending on the level and impact of public spending reductions.¹⁴

Overall, local government service spending was £116.5bn (17.1% of total current public spending) in 2009/10 and £95bn in 2014/15 (13.9% of total current public spending). All figures are in 2015/16 prices. However, changes in the responsibilities of local governments changed over that period so the figures are not directly comparable.¹⁵

Fig 5

The scale of local government cuts, 2009/10 to 2014/15

Measure of local government spending	£bn (2015-16 prices), except where otherwise stated		Percentage change
	2009-10	2014-15	
Local authority net service spending	116.5	95.0	-18.5%
Excluding public health and new social care responsibilities	116.5	90.7	-22.2%
Also excluding education	66.5	53.7	-19.3%
Also excluding police and fire	50.6	40.2	-20.4%
Net service spending per person excluding public health, education, police and fire	£969	£742	-23.4%

Source: IFS

£136m
the amount due to be spent on children’s social services in 2016/17

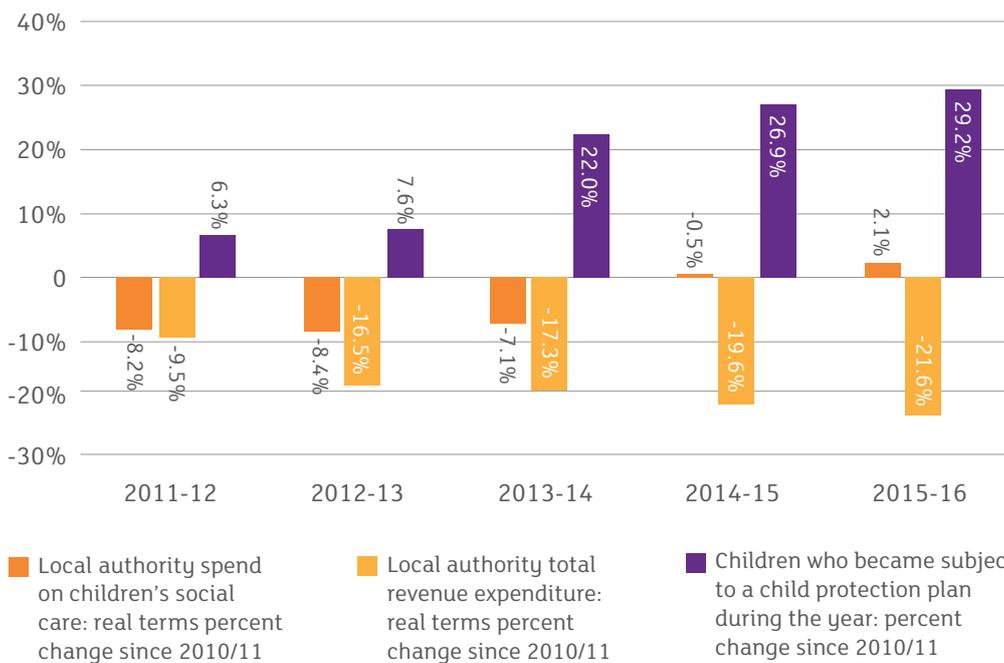
¹⁴ *After the Downturn*, 2009, CIPFA/SOLACE

¹⁵ *Central Cuts, Local Decision-Making: Changes in Local Government Spending and Revenues in England, 2009-10 to 2014-15*, 2015, IFS Briefing Note BN166.

In face of these historically unprecedented reductions in overall revenue, local authorities initially cut their spend on children’s social care. However, as demand continued to rise, local authorities have begun slowly to prioritise children’s services and to make small increases in spending. In 2016/17, this is due to amount to £136m, or 1.8%. As the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children (APPGC) shows, this small increase, although welcome is dwarfed by the increase in child protection.

Fig 6

Change in local authority spend on children’s social care since 2010/11



Source: APPG, *No good options*, 2017

Most recently, a survey for the LGC has shown that pressure on children’s social care budgets is increasing drastically with spending outstripping budgets by close to £1bn over the past three years.

Though budgets set by the sample were £79m higher in 2016/17 than 2014/15, equivalent to a 2.6% increase, expenditure increased by 5%.

LGC has reported that senior local government figures have warned that cuts to non-statutory services such as early intervention, were leading to children entering the care system later with more complex and expensive needs.

To compound difficulties, it is not just the numbers of children that need care or protection that has grown, it is also that each case is costing local authorities more. According to the National Audit Office in 2014/15 spending was equivalent to £2,300 per child in need, compared with around £2,200 per child in 2012/13 and 2013/14.¹⁶

In the face of this, it is perhaps not surprising that the APPGC Inquiry found “clear evidence that funding for children’s social care services is not keeping pace with demand”.¹⁷

16 *Children in need of help or protection*, 2016, Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC723, National Audit Office

17 *No good options*, 2017, All Party Parliamentary Group for Children, NCB, London

However, spending patterns across children’s services authorities also raise some critical questions for local authorities and CFOs. Firstly, the average reported spending on children’s social work varied enormously. In 2014/15, spend ranged from an estimated £340 per child in need in one authority to £4,970 per child in need in another. NAO found that neither DCLG nor authorities understand why spending varies so much.

Secondly, NAO’s analysis found no relationship between local authorities’ reported spending on each child in need and the quality of service.

Using two proxy measures, the NAO found there was wide variation in the effectiveness of work between local authorities. The rates of:

- re-referrals to children’s social care during the year varied from 6% to 46%
- children with repeat child protection plans varied from 3% to 44%.

These figures point to wide variations in service leadership and organisation, which must be addressed through any holistic approach to better services and more effective use of public money.

Thirdly, NAO reports that children in different parts of the country do not get the same access to help or protection. Local thresholds are in place to allow local authorities to best manage their services to meet the needs of children in their locality. However, in some places thresholds seem to bear little relation to local need. In Ofsted’s view, some local thresholds were set too high or too low leading to inappropriate referrals or children left at risk.

Fourthly, Ofsted argue that there is no significant correlation between the level of deprivation in a local authority and the inspection outcome. In other words, better outcomes depend on good local decisions by effective managers more than “either greater affluence in the local area or a higher financial settlement for the local authority”.¹⁸

On the other hand, NAO found that children living in deprived areas are 11 times more likely to have a child protection plan than children living in the most affluent areas of England.¹⁹

This is a complex picture with multiple variables that impact on spend and performance. What is also clear is that without doing more to understand what drives variations in spend and quality, it will be impossible to exert greater influence over either.



Spending patterns across children’s services authorities also raise some critical questions for local authorities and CFOs.



¹⁸ *Annual social care report*, 2016, Ofsted

¹⁹ *Children in need of help or protection*, 2016, Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC723, National Audit Office

suggestions for improving children's services

There is no doubting the dedication and commitment of the children's services workforce. Yet it is also clear that we need to accelerate our trajectory of improvement. The good news is that the sector contains high levels of expertise and if we benefit from the experience of the best, the sector can build on their success. Services can become stronger by welcoming constructive external challenge and review – be it from peers, inspectors, or private sector partners. Children's services is a complex construct, comprising not just pounds and people, but also places, processes, and partnerships. Moreover, the outcomes children experience are not only a consequence of 'services to children'. It is much more holistic than that. It is the sum of a community's dynamism, a locality's human relations, its social, physical, and monetary capital.

Improving these stubborn outcomes, therefore, will clearly require a holistic approach to this overall system.

- Children's services cannot be treated in isolation from the wider social context. Rather, change and improvement will require analysis and understanding of the frontline reality situated in local places.
- CFOs see the greatest potential for efficiencies and outcome improvements in the area of looked after children.
- Where performance is poor, effective leadership of the turnaround process is critical. Success depends on having strong, experienced, and well respected leadership to assess priorities, provide a strategic plan and direction for recovery and improvement processes, and set clear criteria, goals, and milestones. Appropriate monitoring and scrutiny arrangements for the improvement of performance should also be in place.

Those responsible for triggering or leading a turnaround should be able to show how that linkage is articulated through their 'theory of improvement'. A theory is a set of factors that are based on evidence, testing, and refinement, which explain or predict a certain outcome or result.²⁰

This might involve:²¹

- integrating policy planning and performance reporting to create an overarching narrative that is in touch with front line reality and drives services change and performance improvement
- identifying the current customer journey through the service and highlighting areas of duplication
- developing a broad medium-term strategy for early help and prevention, setting out key priorities for early intervention and prevention
- reviewing and rationalising externally commissioned contracts to ensure strategic alignment and operational effectiveness.

20 Bennett, M et al 2013, *Self, sector or centre? Approaches to turnaround*, LGA

21 For more detail and a worked example see the Peopletoo case study in the Appendix

Looking at outstanding children's services²², we can recognise a cluster of core attributes that most would share and from which others can draw inspiration on their improvement journey:

- Confident, ambitious, and influential leadership. Leaders who are visible and effective and who are open to external challenge, new ideas, and working with others.
- Mature professional relationships between the local authority and partner organisations and commissioned service providers. Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement in the quality of help, care and protection that is provided.
- Local authorities actively and accurately identify and respond to the changing needs of their local communities and the performance of their services and staff. Change and improvement are consistently and effectively implemented and reviewed for their impact.
- Professionals are supported to continue learning and improve their professional practice but are also by peers and by leaders in pursuit of high-quality work with families.
- The views and experiences of children, young people and their families are at the centre of service design and influence development and strategic thinking.

A review of children's services with a county council

Peopletoo were commissioned by a large county council to undertake a review of early help and prevention, including adult's and children's services.

The review focused on the following key outcomes:

- Carrying out a detailed review of the current early help provision across many departments with an emphasis on adult's and children's services.
- Identifying the customer journey through the service and highlighting areas of duplication.
- Developing a broad medium-term strategy and setting out key priorities for early help and prevention.
- Developing a target operating model which delivered an effective and integrated service for individuals and families, whilst ensuring that resources are focused on areas where they have the greatest impact.
- Delivering savings by increasing efficiency and removing duplication.

Findings

- The council demonstrated a range of good practice in various departments but this was not universal across the organisation and therefore its benefits were limited. The council's relationship with partners such as district councils similarly reflected this fragmented picture.
- The council took a targeted approach within children's services which was evidenced through the repositioning of early help services delivered to focus on children, young people and families at the higher end of prevention. Children's services were one example where the relationship with district councils was working well with the council focusing on targeted prevention and the districts on universal aspects.

22 Based on evidence from Ofsted and from the wider sector.

- A review of externally commissioned contracts revealed duplication because services were being commissioned by different departments at different times. There were opportunities for efficiencies by clustering contracts together or commissioning becoming more integrated.
- There was a focus on performance managing high value or high risk contracts but less emphasis on managing lower value contracts. However, the sum of smaller contracts amounted to a sizeable amount that, without effective monitoring, could be a drain on council funds.
- There were a range of approaches to information and advice within the council and whilst the needs of different service groups may require a different approach, again there were duplications. A review identified areas where communication with various audiences could be improved and understanding customer behaviour could enable the council to make use of opportunities provided by the digital agenda.

Savings

Overall £3.69m of efficiency savings were identified with some being able to be reinvested in a public health coordination programme of prevention and resilience.

Savings were generated from:

- commissioned contracts
- rationalising children's centre provision
- combining with districts to identify financial and process efficiencies
- removing duplication particularly in how information and advice is given.

Process improvements

Stronger and more integrated early help services were delivered at the same time as financial efficiencies by:

- reducing inconsistent commissioning by centralising commissioning across the council
- reviewing contracts and internal services across related areas of the council, including public health and adult services to reduce duplication and cluster contracts
- implementing consistent quality assurance across all externally commissioned contracts
- enabling consortia behaviours with the voluntary and community sector for contracts to be tendered under a single agency agreement
- developing consistent approaches to contract renewal, reviewing six months before expiry
- reviewing children's centre provision and value for money
- ceasing, reducing or altering non-statutory activities
- communicate better to the community about asset based, self-help approaches to early help and prevention.

In summary

Being able to identify both efficiency and productivity improvements enabled the council to make savings and reinvest in services where it was needed most.

Community resilience was fostered through improved local area coordination to support identified individuals in finding and accessing the assets and support they need.

Using districts' local knowledge to provide more universal support while using a targeted approach within children's services helped make best use of resources.

Taking a holistic approach to early help across council departments brought savings and efficiencies through reduced duplication especially in respect of commissioned services.



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