



CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

Delivering Children's
Services in
Challenging Times

Foreword



I am delighted to introduce this County Councils Network report *Delivering Children's Services in Challenging Times*, my first as the newly appointed CCN Spokesman for Children, Young People and Learning.

Delivering high quality children's services is one of the most important jobs that councils do. The services they provide form the foundation of every child's life from before they are born until they reach adulthood. Whether protecting the most vulnerable, supporting carers or providing school nurses, counties provide a range of care, support and development opportunities for every child.

The challenges facing county Children's Services departments are unrelenting, with rapidly reducing budgets, rising demand and increasing public expectations.

My county colleagues with responsibility for children's services have identified safeguarding and child sexual exploitation as the biggest challenge facing their portfolios. High profile child sexual exploitation cases have rightly meant that councils, including my own, and other public sector partners have been on a steep learning curve to understand the nature of the terrible abuse inflicted on vulnerable children and where the system failed them. This issue has been exacerbated by difficulties in recruiting and retaining social workers who are on the frontline of child protection.

The importance of Children's Services is highlighted by the fact that counties have sought to protect these budgets in relative terms over the past 5 years. This despite a 40% average reduction to council budgets over the last Parliament.

Local Councillors have difficult decisions to make ahead of the 2016/17 budget and beyond. Counties will continue to work hard to protect the most vulnerable and to deliver statutory services. However, counties want to shift the focus to prevent children and their families reaching crisis point. They want to invest, if financially possible, in upstream interventions. This is something that is becoming increasingly difficult in the current financial climate.

Despite financial limitations counties have continued to innovate in order to drive out efficiencies and protect front line services. There are examples across the CCN membership of new service delivery models, such as Children's Trusts, being developed in order to access additional income, new expertise and transform service delivery. Targeted interventions, such as those undertaken through the Troubled Families programme, are also beginning to deliver improved outcomes for children and their families.

It is vital that counties and their public sector partners are empowered to deliver services that provide children and young people with the opportunities to flourish. Fair funding, increased freedom to meet the needs of children locally and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy around information sharing are steps Government must take to allow counties to innovate in order to deliver high quality services.

The Prime Minister has recently said that any local authority failing its children must *'transform the way you provide services, or those services will be taken over by non-profit trusts or other partnerships'*. It is my hope that this report shows Government that counties are rising to the challenge, that we are working tirelessly to improve outcomes for children and to safeguard the most vulnerable in our communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Hudspeth', written over a horizontal line.

**Cllr Ian Hudspeth,
CCN Spokesman for Children,
Young People and Learning**

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County Children's Services

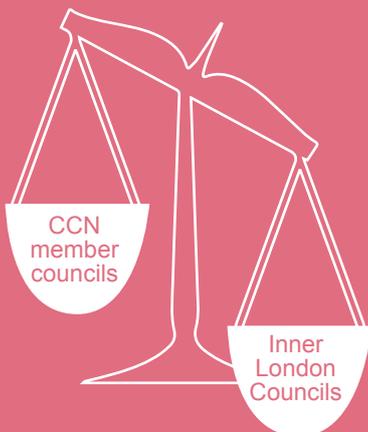
ESTIMATED NET BUDGET EXPENDITURE PER HEAD OF POPULATION ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE FOR 2015/16



CCN member councils



Inner London councils



CCN member councils spend **75% less per head** on children's social care than Inner London Councils.

CCN MEMBER COUNCILS

Estimated Children's Social Care Expenditure during 2015/16 was £2.96bn,

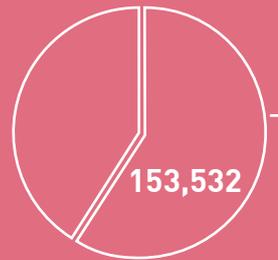


38.5% of all local authority expenditure.

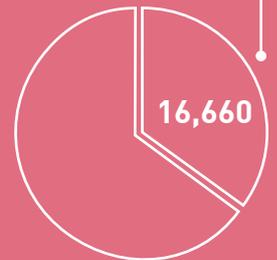
DEMAND FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

37 CCN member councils provided services to 153,532 children in need during 2013/14,

16,660, or 35%, looked-after-children for 12 months

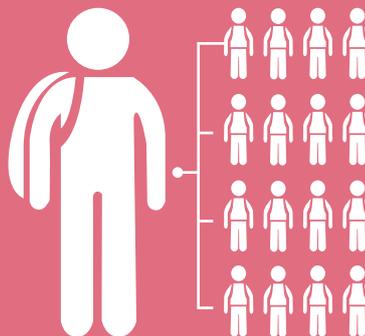


which is equivalent to 59% of all children in need in England.



or more in 2013/14 in England

COUNTIES' SOCIAL WORKERS



Number of Children in Need per social worker: 16



OFSTED INSPECTIONS OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

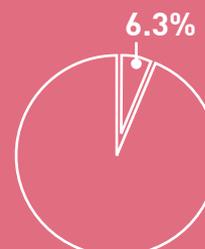
Percentage of local authorities rated as 'Good' by Ofsted in 2014/15 by council type.



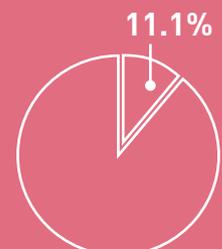
CCN Member Councils



Metropolitan Boroughs



English Unitary (Non-CCN)



London Boroughs

Ofsted Inspection - Children's Services 2014/15. % Rated as 'good' by LA type (DfE, 2015)

Background

CCN member councils provide a range of children's services, including early years, school admissions and health visiting services to support children and young people. For those that need it, counties also target early intervention, family support and social care services to protect the vulnerable and tackle complex problems.

County children's services departments face significant challenges over the course of this parliament due to rapidly reducing budgets, increasing demand and rising public expectations.

The forthcoming Spending Review is unlikely to bring any respite and will lead to further reductions in funding for local government. Councils and Councillors have fought hard to ensure that frontline services have been protected despite a 40% reduction to council budgets over the duration of the last parliamentary term.

The pressure on council budgets is further highlighted by the level of reductions some CCN member councils are proposing for 2016/17. Some county authorities are consulting with their communities on reductions to children's services budgets of up to 25%. Such reductions can, in part, be achieved through efficiency savings, innovation and delivering services through new delivery models. Inevitably these budget reductions mean difficult decisions have to be made across county authorities. Such decisions may lead to service levels being taken back to the statutory minimum or funding being significantly reduced or withdrawn for some services.

This situation is magnified by the fact that counties have historically received lower levels of funding for the provision of children's services. CCN member councils receive significantly less funding per child than other local authority type for schools and children's social care, both of which are vital for the development and protection of children.

Introduction

In 2015 CCN undertook a survey of Cabinet Members with the responsibility for Children's Services. This survey sought to gather the views of CCN member councils on the financial challenges and reputational risks facing county Children's Services departments over the current parliamentary term.

The results showed that children's safeguarding was the biggest risk facing counties. The Baby P safeguarding case and the high profile child sexual exploitation cases in Oxfordshire and Rotherham rightly mean that safeguarding children is a priority for CCN member councils.

This report uses the results of this survey, supported by statistical analysis, to highlight the demands and pressures facing children's services in county areas. To support this analysis the report draws on the views of leading sector figures who provide their views on the opportunities and challenges facing children's services in county areas.

Importantly, the report also showcases a number of good practice examples from CCN member councils. These examples cover a range of topics, from using a negative Ofsted inspection as an opportunity for improvement to improving outcomes for children through the Troubled Families programme.

Analysis and Policy Proposals

The CCN survey of Cabinet Members with responsibility for Children’s Services found that 86% of respondents ranked Children’s safeguarding as the highest priority for Children’s Services in their area. Children’s safeguarding was also identified as the biggest financial risk (68%) and reputational risk (72%) by respondents.

The survey questioned Cabinet Members on a range of subjects, including the effectiveness of partnership working and budgetary issues. These findings, along with desktop research, have formed the basis of the analysis and policy proposals set out below.

FUNDING

The impact of government’s policy of deficit reduction on county budgets, like all local authority budgets, has been severe. CCN member councils have been subject to average reductions of 40% to their budgets, with significant budget reductions extremely likely until at least the end of this parliamentary term.

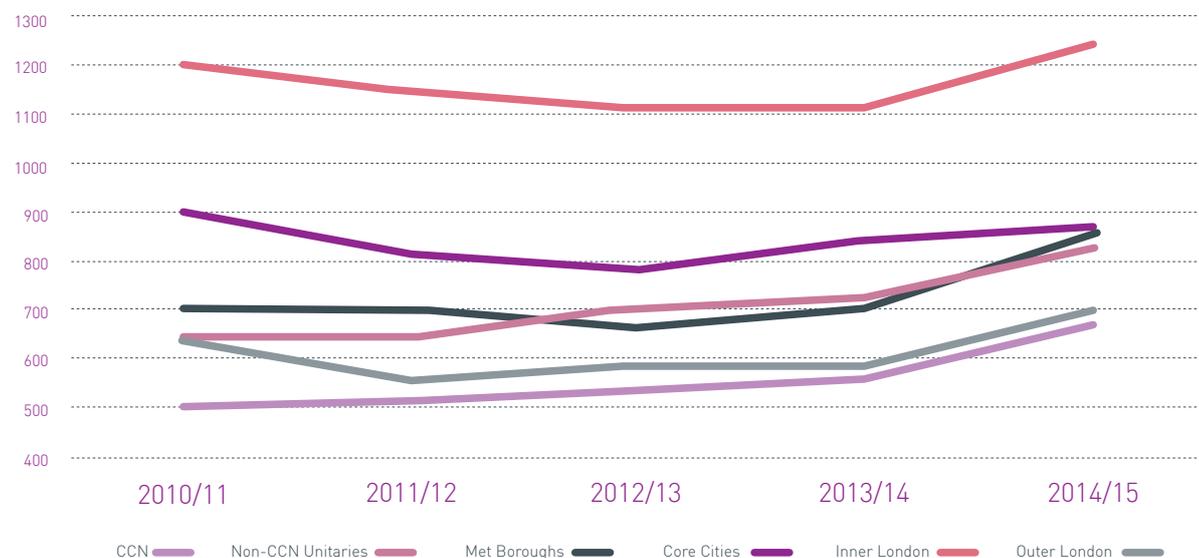
The CCN survey of Cabinet Members with responsibility for Children’s Services found that nearly half (48%) of the Cabinet Members that responded to the survey described their council’s current budgetary pressures in children’s services as ‘severe’, with a further 16% describing them as ‘critical’.

Counties have taken differing approaches to countering rising demand and budget pressures as a result of funding cuts. Our survey showed that approximately 42% of CCN member councils have increased their budgets, whilst 58% have taken the decision to reduce them.

Budget pressures in county areas have been exacerbated by the fact that they have historically received lower funding from government for the provision of children’s services. This is illustrated by the fact the expenditure of CCN member councils is the lowest of any local authority type and has been for the past five years. This despite an increase in expenditure, to in part counter demand pressures, of approximately 33% since 2010/11.

Graph 1 - Total Revenue Expenditure on Children’s Services Per Head of Population (0-17)

(Department for Education, 2015)



‘The challenge now is to continue improving outcomes with a much reduced budget’

County Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children’s Services

Nationally set funding formulae mean that counties spent an average of 86% less per head of population on children’s services than Inner London Councils in 2014/15. Even allowing for higher staffing costs, deprivation and other factors, it is clear that current funding formulae lead to disproportionate allocations that are not in line with the increasing demand and associated costs facing counties.

Despite this funding disparity, counties have the highest performing Children’s Services departments when compared to other local authority types. Of those authorities inspected by Ofsted in 2014/15, county authorities achieved the highest proportion of ‘Good’ ratings at 60%.

This funding disparity is further highlighted by schools funding, which shapes the opportunities and support provided to all children and young people. In 2015/16 schools in county areas received the lowest per pupil funding of schools block funding when compared to other local authority types. This is 45% below the highest per head funding in Inner London and 8% below the English average.

Table 1 - Ofsted Inspections - Children’s Services 2014/15. % Rated as ‘Good’ by LA type (DfE, 2015)

LA Type	%
CCN Member Councils	60%
Metropolitan Boroughs	16.7%
English Unitary (Non-CCN)	6.3%
London Boroughs	11.1%

Graph 2 - Schools Block Funding £ Per Pupil 2015/16

(Department of Education, 2015)



The disparity in funding can have unintended consequences. For example 11% of schools with an ‘outstanding’ judgement from Ofsted were in London (29%) when compared to CCN member councils (18%) in 2014/15. In addition to this, Inner London schools have outperformed counties academically in four of the past five years in the achievement of 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent at A*-C (including English and Maths).

Graph 3 - Achievement of 5 or more A*-C Grades at GCSE or Equivalent, Including English and Maths (%)

(Department of Education, 2015)



CCN member councils recognise that they must take their fair share of budget reductions in order to reduce the national deficit. However, counties must not be impacted upon disproportionately to the detriment of the future prospects of the children living in their areas.

Ultimately, counties must be provided with sufficient and sustainable multi-year revenue settlements that take into account increasing demand on services. Budgetary certainty will allow counties to work with public sector partners to develop local solutions to ensure that the most vulnerable children in our society are protected from harm at the earliest possible stage. Without multi-year budgets that adequately address demand on services, counties will be unable to invest in preventative services that will produce better outcomes from individuals, reduce demand for crisis services and deliver better value for money.

Proposal: Government deliver sustainable and fair multi-year funding settlements to counties for the provision of Children's Services.

INCREASING DEMAND

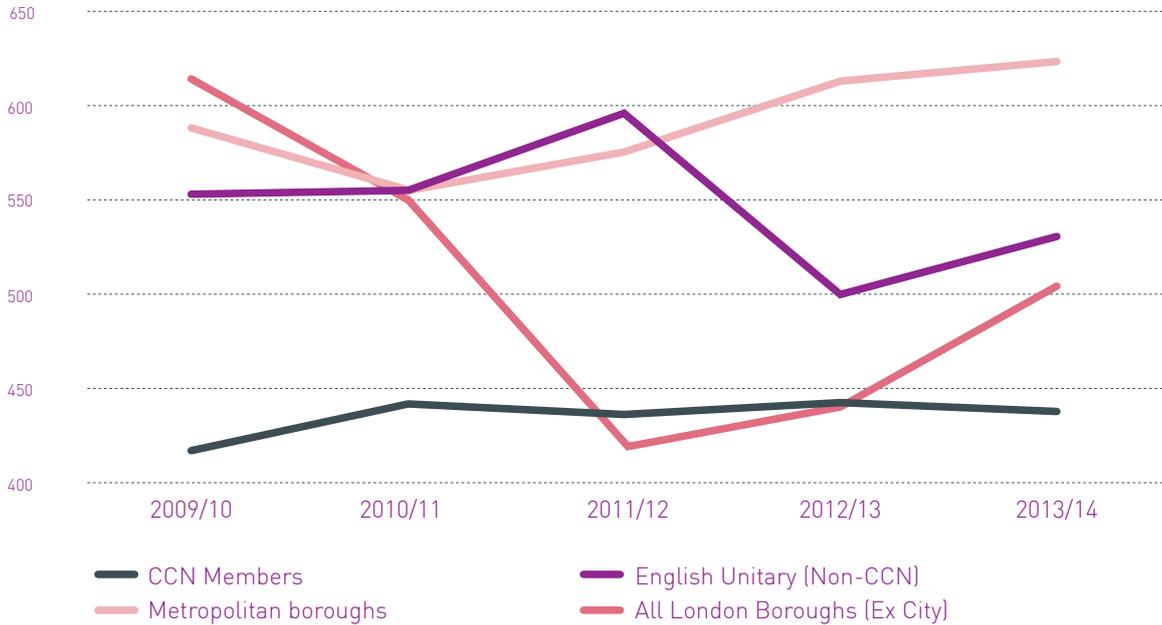
Children's Services departments in counties have been subject to significantly increased demand over the course of the last parliament. The demand for support and intervention services has, in part, been a result of an increased focus on child sexual exploitation (CSE) due to high profile cases in areas including Oxfordshire and Rotherham.

The CCN Spending Review survey showed that children's safeguarding is regarded by Council Leaders as the second largest demand-led pressure facing their authority, after adult social care.¹ The views of county Leaders correspond with those of their Cabinet Members with responsibility for Children's Services who view safeguarding as the main financial pressure facing their portfolio.

Counties have seen a significant increase in the rate of referrals to children's social care when compared to other local authority types (see graph 4, p.10). Between 2009/10 and 2013/14 CCN member councils have seen a 20.3% increase in referrals, whilst other local authority types, such as London Boroughs (-28.5%) and Non-CCN Unitaries (-4.5%) have seen a reduction in referrals over the same period.

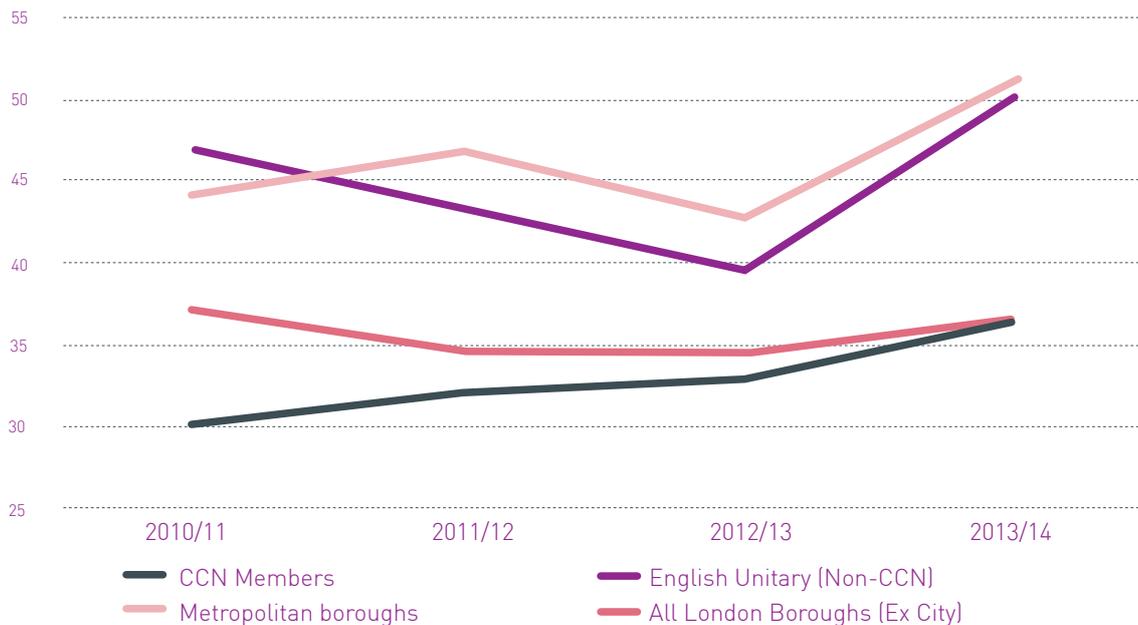
¹p.24, Spending Review Submission, County Councils Network September 2015-20.

Graph 4: Rate of Referrals to Children's Social Care Per 10,000 Population
(Department for Education, 2015)



The increased demand is further illustrated by the substantial increase, 20.4%, in the number of children subject to a child protection plan over a four year period in county areas (see graph 5). CCN member councils have also saw a 13.89% increase in the number of children looked after for 12 months or more from 2009/10-2013/14.

Graph 5 - Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan per 10,000 Population
(Department for Education, 2015)



Counties have been working hard to find more permanent solutions to rising demand. For example, councils have sought to improve outcomes for looked after children by increasing the number of children adopted, thus delivering a safe and stable home. CCN member councils have delivered an 8% increase in the adoption rate for looked after children from 2011-15 (see graph 6). Clearly, there is more work to be done in this area to deliver similar outcomes for a larger number of looked children after.

Graph 6 - Percentage of Looked After Children Adopted During the Year

(Department for Education, 2015)



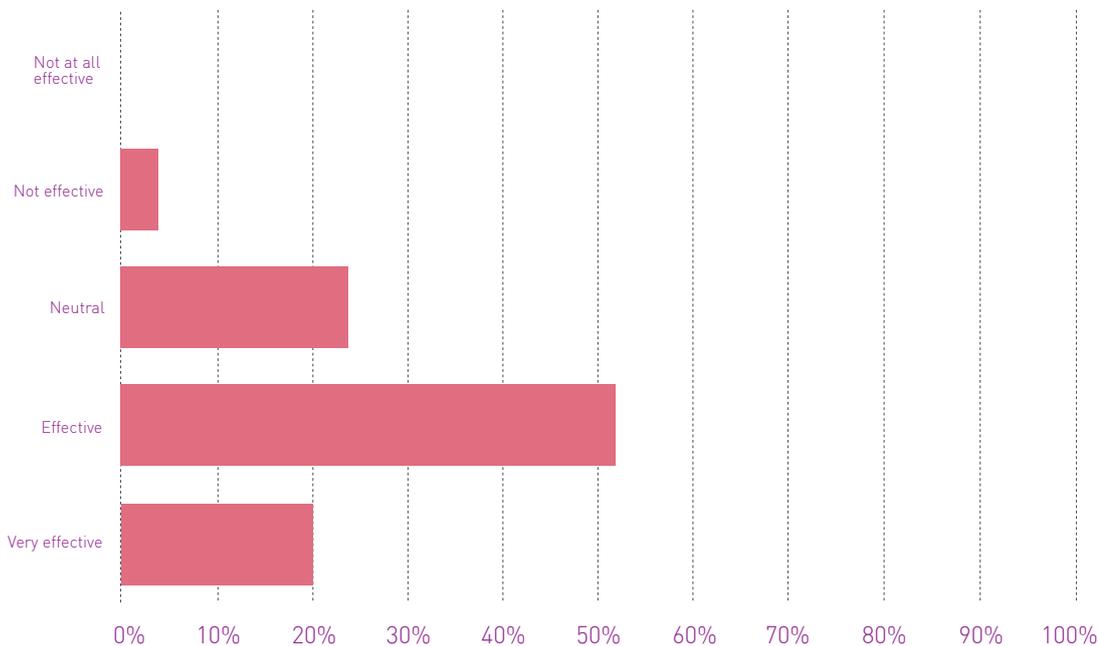
The continued increase in demand for children’s services in counties has meant that a number of CCN member councils have had to divert funding towards crisis intervention activities, rather than preventative services. Such action has been necessary to deliver a balanced budget within the context of significantly reduced funding for local government.

Counties are also utilising partnership working arrangements with public sector partners, such as the Police and NHS, to safeguard children and drive out efficiencies. Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) have been established across the country to provide a conduit for information sharing, joint decision making and coordinated intervention. It is expected that closer working will ‘avoid duplication of processes across agencies, and allow practitioners to step-up and step-down risk assessments, contributing to better allocation of resources’.²

In counties 52% of Cabinet Members with responsibility for Children’s Services rate multi-agency working as ‘effective’ in their areas, whilst 20% deem multi-agency working to be ‘very effective’.

²Multi Agency Working and Information Sharing Project, Home Office, July 2014.

Graph 7 - How Effective Do You Believe Multi-Agency Work in Your Area Is?



Local authorities need to be in a position to build upon such arrangements and work with other public sector partners and the public to safeguard children, ideally preventing instances of abuse and neglect at an early stage, rather than intervening at the crisis stage. Counties strive to deliver the best outcomes possible for children and particularly those most in need, but this will become increasingly difficult as budgets continue to fall.

Proposal: Funding formulae for the provision of Children’s Services must be reviewed to ensure that they adequately reflect demand led pressures.

INTERVENTION AND IMPROVEMENT

In June 2013 Hampshire County Council was appointed to lead a partnership to deliver the Isle of Wight’s Children’s Services provision by the Department of Education for a five year period. This partnership has led to child protection services moving from being rated as ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted in 2012 to ‘requires improvement’ in late 2014.

‘The five-year strategic partnership between the Isle of Wight Council and Hampshire County Council is providing essential stability and is driving demonstrable improvements across children’s services on the island.’
*Ofsted Inspection Report: Isle of Wight, November 2014*³

The Prime Minister recently announced that any local authority failing its children must ‘transform the way you provide services, or those services will be taken over by non-profit trusts or other partnerships’. Such an intervention is not desirable and would place Children’s Services under the control of democratically unaccountable independent trusts.

Counties, as shown in Table 1, page 10, were considered by Ofsted to be delivering the highest performing children’s services of any local authority type in 2014/15. Therefore, partnerships, such as that between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, should be considered as the favoured option by Government to drive sector improvement.

Proposal: Government prioritise partnerships between local authorities to improve ‘failing’ children’s services departments, rather than placing them in to control of democratically unaccountable independent trusts.

³Isle of Wight, Ofsted Inspection Report, November 2014

‘The five-year strategic partnership between the Isle of Wight Council and Hampshire County Council is providing essential stability and is driving demonstrable improvements across children’s services on the island.’

Ofsted Inspection Report: Isle of Wight, November 2014

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Our survey showed that 16% of Cabinet Members with responsibility for Children's Services ranked the recruitment and retention of permanent and temporary social workers as the greatest financial challenge facing their local authority. This was the second highest ranked financial challenge after children's safeguarding.

A qualified and stable workforce is vital component of safeguarding. However, CCN member councils saw their social worker vacancy rate increase from 12% to 14% from 2012/13 to 2013/14.

Staff turnover rates also increased over the same period from 14% to 16%. This has subsequently led to an increase in the use of costly agency staff over the same period, with the agency worker rate increasing from 10% to 13%.

This situation has not been helped by the negative public and media perception of social work. As far back as 2011 the Munro Review found that *'There is considerable evidence that the child protection system and social workers in particular are still portrayed very negatively in the media'*.⁴

Added to this, in 2009 the Social Work Task Force's report highlighted social workers' concerns about the way in which the profession is reported on in the media and the impact of this on recruitment, morale and public perception.⁵ These issues have not gone away, with high profile child sexual exploitation cases focusing the public and media spotlight on the profession further.

The perception of children's social work is also being negatively impacted by single word Ofsted inspection judgements. These are unhelpful as they may hide the fact that there is good practice taking place at the council being inspected. As stated above, an inadequate judgement may lead to that local authority increasing wages and therefore attracting social workers from surrounding areas. Adversely, a negative judgement may also prompt children's social workers to seek employment at a higher performing council.

Proposal: The government's Child Protection Taskforce must engage with counties to ensure that good practice to improve the recruitment and retention of children's social workers is identified and used to shape future policy decisions.

⁴ Munro Review, 2011.

⁵ Building a safe, confident future, Social Work Task Force, December 2009

Survey of Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Children's Services:

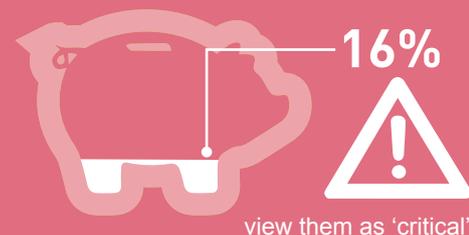
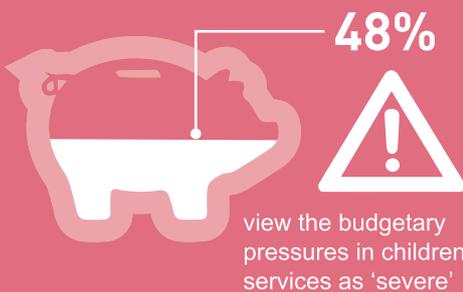
CHILDREN'S SERVICES PRIORITIES



84%

of CCN Member Councils view Children's Safeguarding as their highest priority.

BUDGET PRESSURES



PARTNERSHIP WORKING



20%

deem multi-agency working in their area to be 'very effective'

52%

view multi-agency working as being 'effective' in their area

EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING BOARDS



24%

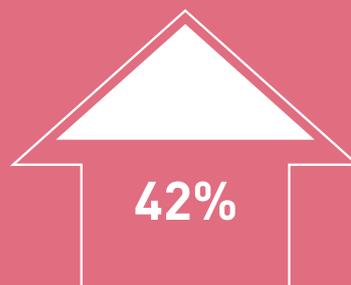
deem them to be 'very effective'

52%

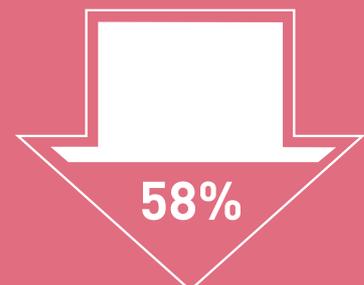
believe they are 'effective'

FUNDING CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CCN Member Councils have taken differing approaches to rising demand and budgetary pressures as a result of funding cuts.



increased their budgets



reduced them

86%

is how much less per head of population that counties spent on Children's Services in 2014/15 when compared to councils in Inner London.

33%

the amount counties increased revenue expenditure on Children's Services per head of population from 2010/11-2014/15. This is the highest of any local authority type.

45%

the amount below Inner London councils that CCN member councils received for schools block funding in 2015/16'.

11%

the difference between the proportion of schools receiving an 'Outstanding' rating from Ofsted in counties (18%) and London (29%).

20%

the increase in referrals to Children's Social Care per 10,000 population for CCN member councils between 2009/10-2013/14.'

19%

the number of children looked after adopted in CCN member council areas in 2014/15. The average for England is 17%.

14%

the increase in the number of children looked after for 12 months or more from 2009/10-2013/14 in CCN member councils.

20%

the increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan from 2010/11-2013/14 in CCN member councils.

Think Pieces

Across the country Directors of Children's Services are advising their local authority about the impact of budget reductions. Each of us shares the corporate responsibility to ensure that local needs are met and that our Councils can deliver a balanced budget. So whilst we must advise on what is needed and represent the interests of children and young people services, to be effective, we have learnt not to exaggerate. Our credibility is at stake.

So when I say we are dealing with a ticking time bomb, I am not exaggerating.

I am deeply concerned that the full impact of recent cuts to local government funding are not yet well understood. Many of the changes being made take time to implement. The impact will not wash through the system for another few years. And at the same time further cuts will be made.

No one should underestimate how hard local authorities have worked to minimise the impact of reducing resources and increasing demand but the signs are all too visible that the system cannot continue to absorb such pressures. Local authorities are reporting changes in the profile and characteristics of their populations – greater number of families in poverty, inward migration and complex family structures. These factors impact upon safeguarding activity because there is a correlation between activity across the protection system and levels of deprivation.

Local authorities are keeping more children safe than ever before.

In the years between 31 March 2011 and 31 March 2014, local authorities experienced:

- a 21% increase in referrals (660,500 in 2013/14)
- a 65% increase in the number of children becoming subjects of child protection plans and
- a 48% increase in the number of children starting to be looked after.

Funding reductions in other areas of councils coupled with financial pressures across all public agencies are now having a clear impact on the preventative offer and children's social care services.

Significant reductions in early help services have already been necessary to balance the books. And this will, in time, impact negatively on social care activity. We will find ourselves as a nation paying a heavy price as a consequence of late intervention.

All of this amounts to a very serious situation. We must understand the cumulative impact across the system, across the country, and all of these things coming together. By doing so we must weigh the potential future impact of the decisions we make now.

Of course we must make the most of opportunities to redesign ways of working and redesign approaches across the wider system. I know that all authorities are developing innovative and creative approaches spurred on by the challenges we face.

But there is a looming crisis in relation to our ability to keep a balance in the system between investment in early help and the costs of late intervention. Government needs to monitor this very closely and consider if steps need to be taken to ensure we do not damage our ability to prevent serious harm occurring.



As Children's Commissioner for England, my priority is ensuring that all children, and particularly the most vulnerable, get the help and support they need.

With the next Spending Review fast approaching, the Prime Minister has set the scene: the Government is seeking to do more with less. Austerity measures are to continue apace and council services across the UK will change dramatically.

In exchange for more devolved powers, councils will be expected to be innovative and take on new approaches.

I have been giving much thought to this issue: not only about how authorities can maintain essential services for children, but also how they can capitalise on the devolution agenda to improve them.

Thus far, much of the debate about devolution has focused on infrastructure projects and transport networks. But opportunities are also there for authorities to think about strategic moves to take on new powers around children's services in creative new approaches and managed change.

Ultimately we have an opportunity to create a system that caters for children, rather than one that expects children to fit around social services. We should strive to create services that involves and engages children, that involves them in monitoring effectiveness and which is innovative and finds new approaches to intervening early and tackling vulnerability to avoid a crisis developing.

One way in which councils are looking to improve efficiency and importantly, quality, is to share some of the services they provide. In some areas, joining up services seem sensible. New regional approaches to adoption are on their way and many are looking at the potential for such change and collaboration around wider child protection and school support. Early years offers opportunities to forge new approaches to early intervention, childcare and early years support.

Along with these examples, I am very interested in finding out how any such changes to council services impact on those being protected and receiving help. The priority throughout all of these changes must be to ensure that children are protected from harm and that those who are most in need get the proper support they require.

As Children's Commissioner, my ability to shine a light on the services children and families receive, whether poor or exemplary is enshrined in law. I can 'bring any matter to the attention of either House of Parliament' – and with this in mind, I am keen for local authorities to contribute to my forthcoming business plan.

By telling me what is going on at the coalface, my office can exert real influence to ensure that the quality of services that children receive remains high, no matter how they are delivered. That is why, as these changes take shape, I am keen to hear the views and experiences of councils across the country, including those belonging to the County Councils Network.



Keeping children safe is arguably the most important of all the responsibilities placed on councils. Since the mid-2000s, most have seen a massive increase in referrals, along with increased numbers of children requiring a child protection plan. Ensuring councils can fulfill their obligations to safeguard children is paramount. However, in what most international comparisons rate as one of the most effective child protection systems in the world, the picture is not encouraging.

The Ofsted Single Inspection Framework has 28% of councils currently rated as 'inadequate', 55% 'requiring improvement' and 18% considered 'good'. Not a single council has been rated as 'outstanding' in the last two and half years and the most recent authority to receive this grade has only this year seen itself fall into the inadequate category. While the performance bar has been raised, this in itself is not an excuse for a system that appears to be improving on most key indicators, but whose single-sentence regulatory judgments are going the other way.

One of the underlying challenges requiring urgent and ongoing action is addressing the issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of social workers. The sector is faced with a high turnover rates, vacancy levels and a high dependency on agency staff to plug the gaps, particularly in the increasing number of councils who have been judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted. This is not a sustainable state of affairs and there is no quick fix to this problem.

It is vital therefore that the social work profession is shown in its true light to encourage people to enter the profession. Safeguarding our most vulnerable children is surely one of the most important of professions dependent upon having a workforce of high quality social workers who can provide consistent support for those children who need it most.

Of course councils and social workers cannot do this important work, whether tackling child protection, child sexual exploitation or radicalisation, in isolation. Safeguarding is everyone's business, from the Police, NHS and teachers to friends and neighbours in communities. It is vital that we all act as the eyes and ears on the ground and report anything suspicious to those agencies with safeguarding responsibilities.

Clearly the challenges facing councils go beyond safeguarding. On the early years agenda we are lobbying for a greater role for councils in joining up early years and childcare provision, in the context of a focus on early intervention and support for parents to improve outcomes for children.

Business as usual is not an option in the current climate. Councils have to make difficult decisions about service priorities if they are to continue to protect our most vulnerable children. In my own authority, Hampshire County Council, we are undertaking a far reaching transformation programme. For Children's Services we will be introducing a new approach to social care, with our partners on the Isle of Wight, called 'Active Agents for Change'. We were awarded a one-off grant of approximately £4m from the Department for Education's (DfE's) Innovation programme to support the implementation and delivery of a whole system change.

This is an 'invest to save' funding model which is enabling the service to explore how it can transform to move to more efficient and effective ways of working and service delivery.

It is an explicit expectation of the DfE's Innovation Programme that the new ways of working will lead to an increase in the number of children and families that can be helped to safely stay together rather than children necessarily coming into care. It is intended that, through investing in taking this more proactive approach to creating change within families, there would be a reduction in the costs of care as the number of children who become looked after will reduce.

This is just one model of possible improvement. There need to be more like it shared across this challenging but crucial sector.



John Betts

Lead Authority Advisor- Children's Services



Finance & Children's Services may appear to be odd bedfellows. To caricature, the former knows the cost of everything but has no sense of the value of early intervention, family support and social care services to protect the vulnerable; the latter, meanwhile spends like pools winner Viv Nicholson with no sense of prudence or impact or consideration of spent resources lost to other parts of the sector.

The local truth is, of course, much more nuanced and important as we move toward a new Comprehensive Spending Reviews, alongside potentially radically different ways of funding via devolution deals and self sustaining Authorities as Revenue Support Grant disappears and more reliance is placed on business rates.

Counties have historically been underfunded for the provision of children's services. County Councils receive some of the lowest funding settlements related to education. Demand on children's safeguarding services has arisen at a time when local authority budgets have faced funding cuts of 40% from 2010 – 2015.



Despite this, Counties continue to play a major role in children's lives, whether through the provision of early years, school admissions and transport or health visiting services; or, more targeted services that protect the most vulnerable and tackle complex social problems. All this occurs within a context of increased demand for children's services. For example, an increase of over 20% in a number of children subject to a child protection plan over a 4 year period in County areas. There is also a challenging agenda where changes in population profiles have meant that the location of school places does not always match need and demand. This requires a more innovative use of capital funding at a local level.

So faced with these financial challenges, how do Counties providing children's services respond? Well if the proverb is correct and necessity is the mother of invention then austerity is surely the foster carer of children's services innovation! Counties are forming new delivery models regarding the provision of children's services, whether this be through multi-agency safeguarding hubs, trading models working alongside multi academy trusts or assets and services being transferred to the voluntary sector to improve outcomes for children.

All of this innovative practice and local experimentation is great and needs to be encouraged. We need to collect better evidence about what works and use this to underpin policy that improves services for children. Evidence based practice can be applied across Counties if we fairly compare different approaches and disseminate this and allow scrutiny by practitioners.

Perhaps the transfer of public health into local government can help foster such a culture that sits in the health sector. We would then have a better basis for welding together financial input to measurable outputs and combine this with experience and professional skills. This would generate better insight into whether scarce financial resources are being properly deployed. That should help ensure that every child, whatever their background or circumstance, can be healthy, safe, enjoy life and achieve their potential, make a positive contribution to society and achieve their economic well-being. We can then use the financial pressure of austerity to better target resources in a meaningful way, learning and adapting as we go forward, so that children's services in Counties really do strive to deliver the best possible outcomes for children.

People working with children have a legal responsibility for their welfare, particularly Directors of Children Services, lead cabinet members for Children Services and Chairs of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCB). But local safeguarding arrangements need to go beyond this framework so that safeguarding is everyone's business.

For example, there is little (if anything) in legislation or guidance describing the role of council scrutiny in safeguarding children; and with the independent chair of the LSCB responsible for scrutinising the LSCB activities it can be difficult for councillors to use their scrutiny role.

What is clear is that no one person or organisation can fully ensure adequate safeguarding arrangements. Developing effective working relationships that add value are crucial. My experience is that effective council scrutiny can be a key player within this framework and can be an effective tool in helping develop these relationships and in ensuring positive outcomes for children. But there is a risk that scrutiny can be undervalued or misunderstood, as evidenced by the serious consequences of failures of independent internal scrutiny and challenge in places across England. Louise Casey highlighted this risk in her report about events in Rotherham.



“Inspectors concluded that overview and scrutiny had been deliberately weakened and under-valued. The structures and processes look superficially adequate, but the culture has been one where challenge and scrutiny were not welcome.”

Despite this, scrutiny is being recognised in some places as vital to effective safeguarding systems; as can be demonstrated from the applications to CfPS's Good Scrutiny Awards¹ – showcasing exemplar scrutiny reviews. 2015 saw a number of bids from councils on protecting the vulnerable and safeguarding children.

I would argue that effective scrutiny of safeguarding practice, performance, policy and outcomes can help build a clearer picture of what is really happening for children. As described in CfPS's principles of good scrutiny, scrutiny can offer a reality check to the performance and quality of all aspects of safeguarding. Scrutiny councillors are well placed to promote and understand the direct experiences of local children and the knowledge and insights they bring. Stories, case studies and examples from children can make the safeguarding process more real to decision-makers and demonstrate the impact of how systems operate.

However to make the most of this potential, scrutiny councillors need to build their knowledge and confidence to tackle the safeguarding agenda. It is crucial that members feel confident in their capacities to scrutinise safeguarding. Low public confidence in safeguarding and unfavourable media attention can create an environment of anxiety and concern.

A good scrutiny review will demand evidence that systems are in place to listen and understand the experience and needs of local children. It can provide new perspectives on how individual and diverse groups of children have access to services that support and protect them. By asking key questions about how child-centred local services are, scrutiny can be an important partner in protecting children and ensuring they thrive.

County Scrutiny Committees should give time to exploring the context of their local children's safeguarding arrangements and ensure that scrutiny's role within this system is explored and understood. Counties also need to work with their district councils to ensure that any review of safeguarding reflects local knowledge. Whether scrutiny committees intend to undertake a major exercise or integrate scrutiny of safeguarding practice into rolling work programmes, the development of a brief protocol between the committee and the LSCB will clarify their respective roles. Each has responsibilities to review, scrutinise, challenge and to hold to account. The protocol will avoid confusion, duplication and ensure that scrutiny is complementary and adds value.

CfPS' four principles of good scrutiny:

- Provides 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision makers
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public and communities
- Is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process
- Drives improvement in public services.

¹<http://cfps.org.uk/winners-GSA2015>

Case Studies



INTRODUCTION

When a Joint Area Review judged children's social care in Essex as inadequate in 2008 the impact was devastating. Ministerial intervention followed swiftly. This think piece considers the impact of a judgement of inadequate, how we in Essex responded and got to good and suggests questions to consider in your own authorities.

IMPACT

Few people want to work for an inadequate authority. Social workers voted with their feet and left and it became much harder to replace them. Reliance on temporary staff and private companies came at high cost and without fundamental change in the system, didn't deliver better outcomes.

There was a focus on the symptoms, evidenced by the Ofsted Action Plan and performance indicators, yet as the Munro review highlighted, these have often focussed on the wrong measures.

Some leaders thought that structural change would provide the answer – again very costly and disruptive; and we certainly experienced too many reorganisations.

But worse, social work practice became defensive and the Baby Peter case only served to entrench this: the number of children subject of a child protection plan doubled to almost 1,000 and the number of children in care increased by nearly 400 to over 1,600.

Referrals to social care went up, thresholds for intervention dropped, caseloads rose and children and families weren't seen or worked with effectively. Consequently there was an upward pressure on cost as children moved from assessment to child protection to care without any proper assessment of whether this was necessary or consideration of alternatives.

GETTING TO GOOD

Establishing the right leadership team with a focus on system change helped. They were able to take an holistic approach, rather than simply focussing on the Ofsted Action Plan, in the firm belief that good social work would deliver good outcomes.

The senior level of the organisational structure moved from functional leadership to area-based leadership. 3rd tier managers now had a very clear oversight of the child's journey through the system.

Social workers had to be protected, so they could do purposeful social work:

- Thresholds were re-established with an agreement at the LSCB
- A Family Solutions Service (Troubled Families) was established, preventing referrals and providing a step-down service for children on a child protection plan
- D-Bit (intensive intervention) Teams were established to work with families of children on the edge of care.
- Caseloads reduced.

Direct social work practice began to deliver a reduction in referrals, open cases, child protection plans (now under 500) and the number of children in care dropped (now just over 1,000).



Our focus is now on outcomes not processes.

Of course there's still more to do in Essex; but earlier this year, we became the only local authority to bid successfully for a DfE contract to provide Advice, Support and Challenge to authorities in Ministerial intervention.

QUESTIONS

Inadequate Ofsted ratings and Ministerial intervention are best avoided, so here are a few questions to challenge - do you:

- have clear, robust thresholds for children's social care, which are shared by your partners?
- accept that social work is about risk management; and risk cannot be eliminated?
- allow enough time for social workers to see children and their families and to build productive relationships?
- have effective services to prevent children coming into care?

What can we do together to influence the inspection regime and help mitigate the impact of an inadequate inspection judgement?

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN DERBYSHIRE

Making sure children and young people who need adopting are placed with the right families is complex and time consuming – and so it should be. We need to ensure they get the best possible start with their new families.

But when Derbyshire was highlighted as taking too long to find children in our care a home, we knew we needed to do more.

By refocusing our approach our aim was to speed up the process both for families wanting to adopt as well as the children and young people waiting for a placement.

Our new approach included:

- Increasing the number of staff in the adoption team
- Boosting capacity in our family finder team to identify approved adopters ready to match with our children
- Running a comprehensive publicity campaign

Today, the average time it takes for us to match a child with an adoptive family is 597 days – 30 days less than it used to.

Between 2011-2014, we increased the number of adoptions from care by 6% - up from 19% to 25%. In the same period for England, the rate increased from 12% to 14%, showing the changes we've adopted improved our ability to find homes for children in our care more quickly than the average.

One of the changes we introduced was to use a new community care worker to carry out initial parts of the adoption process without the need for a social worker's involvement. This freed up staff to focus on more complex elements. Another major innovation was to review the placement process to cut out multiple assessments. Ensuring the initial medical examination was comprehensive prevented a child having to undergo multiple assessments throughout the adoption process. This also saved time by giving us a fully informed picture early on.

We now profile prospective adopters through online forums and a range of regional consortiums, helping us identify the right adopters. We are also raising awareness of Fostering for Adoption, allowing children to be placed with potential permanent carers on a fostering basis while we seek placement orders from the courts.

As well as using these new approaches we've worked closely with our communications team to develop a wide-ranging publicity strategy. We use traditional channels and social media – including Facebook advertising and Twitter - to increase the level of inquiries and recruit families from range of backgrounds.

Finding suitable placements for large sibling groups is an important part of our work. We trained staff to focus on these groups and on children with complex needs. Not only does this improve outcomes for our children, it also generates significant savings at a time when budgets are under significant pressure.

Implementing new ways of working has relied on the hard work and flexibility of our dedicated staff. In 2013, Ofsted inspectors found us to be "good". But we are not complacent and continue to work hard to find the best possible home for each and every child.

We still have a number of complex cases where individuals are waiting for a long time and this remains a challenge. But we do not give up on them easily and the authority performs particularly well in finding permanent families for children with complex needs - even if it takes a bit more time.

We're ambitious for our children and our aim is to reduce the wait in Derbyshire even further - to 550 days by March 2016.

But it's not all about the numbers. By making sure our children in care are given a stable home life we can offer them the best start and help them grow up to be happy and successful adults.



We have been on a steep learning curve following the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) offences uncovered by Operation Bullfinch. In line with areas across the country suffering from this terrible type of crime, there was insufficient understanding of the nature and extent of this type of abuse, leading to a failure by key agencies to communicate and collaborate early enough and fully enough.

The capability to tackle CSE has since been transformed; we have developed a far greater understanding of this form of abuse, and together with partners we are dedicated to ensuring that resources and expertise are available to undertake the action required to identify those at risk, help those who have already suffered CSE, and bring offenders to justice.

Central to this has been the creation, in 2012, of the Kingfisher Team; a multi-agency team focused solely on tackling CSE. The core team of 20 people consists of social workers, police, and health professionals working from a single location. Its remit is to help and protect children who have been, or who it is thought may have been, subject to CSE. It also seeks to disrupt criminal activity with the ultimate aim of court proceedings against perpetrators.

The team has an active caseload of around 70 children at any one time. By ensuring the social workers have small caseloads (<10 children) they are able to focus on building trusting relationships with these children and young people and support disclosure of abuse which has taken place or is at risk of taking place.

In the past these children were wrongly treated by many public agencies around the country as 'wayward teenagers' – now we know that persistence and relationship-building are what makes the difference. A thorough understanding of the impact of grooming permeates our whole approach and the Kingfisher team work relentlessly over many months with girls and boys to gain their trust.

The team also works with other partners, who now also have a greater understanding of CSE; the Ambulance Service, Youth Offending Service, Fire and Rescue Service, Trading Standards and Probation as well as our City Council and District Councils.

This wider partnership on prevention work has also helped us to disrupt potential CSE activity, for example we use multi agency patrols to identify people and premises of concern and disrupt activity creatively. We have used trading standards, health and safety and fire safety to close down premises (2 guesthouses and 1 pub), and undertaken raids for drugs and underage drinking. We also work with the police to use harbouring notices and other tactics to disrupt activity. To date 60 abduction notices have been issued as part of disruption tactics.

We also have awareness raising activity underway on a huge scale, covering children, parents, schools, front line professionals, communities, hotels, taxi drivers, housing associations and others. Since 2011, 6,000 children a year have seen age-appropriate drama workshops '*Chelsea's Choice*' and '*Somebody's Sister, Somebody's Daughter*', to help them understand the risks of CSE and know what to do if they are worried about themselves or friends. We have also run events for community stakeholders such as voluntary, community and faith groups called 'Everybody's Business' by which promote the message that professionals alone cannot stop CSE; we need everyone to understand the signs of grooming and take action when they have concerns. We have developed a comprehensive safeguarding framework for transport services, including taxi-drivers, which includes safeguarding training and higher standards of risk assessment and quality monitoring.

We have also applied learning from tackling CSE to other areas of our work – e.g. new models for children on the edge of care, a new placement strategy, a new approach to missing children, to neglect and to adolescence. The enhanced partnership working arrangements, particularly around co-location of teams has also informed the establishment of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which is a single point of contact for all children's social care referrals, and has recently also expanded to cover vulnerable adults.

We have taken every opportunity to share our learning with others, raising national issues that need national solutions, sharing what we have found works with other professionals and learning from them.



IMPROVING THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKERS

The recruitment and retention of children's social workers has been a challenge for Central Bedfordshire Council as a result of significant investment in new social work posts. As a result the Council found itself over-dependent on agency social workers. There was also a relatively high turnover of permanent staff. Over the last 18 months a range of strategies and strong political support and investment has seen vacancy and turnover rates reduce by more than 50%.

Restructuring the service has resulted in small, well-supported teams with clearer accountability and manageable caseloads. In 2013, the average caseload was around 30 children per social worker; in 2014 it had fallen to approximately 17. Market Rate Supplements were also introduced to ensure pay rates were competitive. Those working in front-line teams currently attract a higher rate supplement.



Attracting permanent staff was a key objective and the *Academy of Social Work and Early Intervention (AYSE)* was launched in June 2014. This integrated the expertise of our Early Years and Children's Social Care workforce teams. One result of this was the development of a marketing strategy that meant Central Bedfordshire was being promoted across the region as a 'Great Place to Live and Work.' Supporting this was our award winning social work recruitment website www.loveyourjobagain.com

The Academy has a strong Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) service (accredited by <http://matrixstandard.com>) that deals with any enquiries about working in children's services, with special emphasis on those with an interest in social work. This is underpinned by activities that have created 'a pipeline' of high quality graduates wishing to join the Council: targeting high-quality newly qualified social workers through rigorous recruitment programmes and recruiting two cohorts a year; support for Training in Employment Routes for children services staff; and participating in the *Step Up to Social Work* programme.

Sacha Rymell, Head of Service says: *'The robust recruitment processes via our ASYE Assessment Centre sees one in ten applicants being successfully recruited. This has resulted in some of the best prepared and committed newly qualified social workers I have seen in my time as a social work manager.'*

Our ASYE programme ensures consistent assessment standards and frees up busy teams from finding the capacity to provide ASYE assessment. A virtual Student Practice Unit has improved student placements and over the last year two thirds of students who undertook their final year placements with the Council have joined our ASYE programme. The introduction of a paid internship programme for students undertaking a Masters degree in social work has also raised our profile.

Significantly improving the Continuous Professional Development and career development opportunities have been key to retaining social workers. These now range from Doctorates and Masters level programmes, to Research Forums and lunchtime practice improvement sessions delivered by Consultant Social Workers.

The Children and Care Council has been involved in our innovations and are involved in the recruitment of ASYEs and delivering learning and development. Some young people have earned qualifications as a result.

Future plans include our *Aspiring Managers and Head of Service Programmes* and a 'Career Map' that helps social workers plan their careers from the ASYE through to Head of Service.

Cllr Carole Hegley our Executive Member for Children's Services notes that "as with all complex issues there is no one 'magic bullet', but political and senior management commitment, targeted pay rates, and support for the creation of the Social Work and Early Intervention Academy, has significantly improved recruitment and retention of children's social workers in Central Bedfordshire".

EXPANDED TROUBLED FAMILIES PROGRAMME: IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

Cheshire West and Chester has turned around 100 percent of the government set target of 525 families on the first Troubled Families Programme between April 2012 and March 2015, meaning all children within an identified family have been back in school for a year when they were previously truant or were excluded, or youth crime and anti-social behaviour has been significantly cut across the whole family or an adult in the home has moved off benefits and into work for three consecutive months or more. Over the lifetime of the Programme identified families have reduced anti-social behavior by 60 percent, offending rates for children under 18 reduced by 33 percent and children achieved fewer than 15 percent unauthorised absences or less than three fixed exclusions. Also families have achieved continuous employment or progressed closer to work demonstrating improved family stability and improving children's life chances.



This success saw West Cheshire becoming an early adopter of the Expanded Troubled Families Programme in January 2015 and will work with 1730 families over the next five years. The West Cheshire Troubled Families Expanded Programme will act as a driver for the continuation of our transformation work to support families, placing emphasis on preventing escalation and the de-escalation of complex and costly cases - driving public sector partnership working not just in West Cheshire, but the wider Cheshire and Warrington sub-region and beyond. The introduction of the innovative Integrated Early Support model brings together professionals from a range of public services such as Council Services, Schools, Health Providers, Police, Registered Social Landlords and Jobcentre Plus to put a single co-ordinated package of support around these families with complex needs. The families involved as well as a large number of other families have received help to effectively deal with the full range of problems and turn their lives around.

Cheshire West and Chester's success was made possible through our partnership approach to whole system reform. We embarked on a journey to transform services for families by developing and introducing an innovative approach to service redesign and delivery through Integrated Early Support, resulting in one front door for identification of families, truly integrated case management teams, common approaches to case recording and systems and targeted interventions for families.

Integrated Early Support is designed to deliver a multi-agency response to domestic abuse incidents, complex cases where worklessness is a concern. The service aims to:

- Ensure early intervention is at the heart of our approach for families with multiple and complex needs and victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse;
- Deliver a model with a lasting solution, we want to stop the multiple intervention cycle and reduce long term demand for acute and reactive services;
- Implement a shared agenda to deliver not only sustainable but improved outcomes for families, providing the right support for those in need, at the right time, in the right place from the right people; and
- Reduce costs on the public purse.

I am delighted with the results. This is due to the hard work of our staff across our Integrated Early Support partnership.

Police and Fire Officers, Family Case Workers and health and housing colleagues have all risen to the challenge, helping 525 families across West Cheshire to support children back to school, parents into work and reductions in youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

With the Integrated Early Support model in place being continuously improved, Cheshire West and Chester Council is well placed to continue its success in working with these families and to tackle the increased range of problems included within the Expanded Troubled Families Programme





CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network (CCN) is a network of 37 County Councils and Unitary authorities that serve county areas. We are a cross-party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the wider local government association and to Central Government departments.

To discuss any of our proposals in greater detail, please contact:

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If you would like further information on CCN, including the latest policy briefings, publications, news and events, please visit our website at www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk

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