

Estimating Children's Services spending on vulnerable children

Vulnerability technical spend report

JULY 2019

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Acknowledgements

The Children's Commissioner is incredibly grateful to the local authorities, and particularly their finance and data teams. Without their engagement, diligence and hard work this work would not have been possible. Thanks also to Dr. Lisa Holmes (University of Oxford), Professor Paul Bywater (University of Huddersfield), Paul Randall and many others for their valuable views and comments throughout the project. Any views, inaccuracies, or errors remain the responsibility of the author, not the Children's Commissioner or other parties.

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Executive summary

This report provides new estimates of how much is spent on children in specific categories of need and vulnerability across a sample of local authority children's services departments.

The Children's Commissioner's Office visited over a dozen LAs between November 2018 and February 2019 to gather evidence from Directors of Children's Services, elected council members, heads of finance and programme managers on local pressures on children's services budgets, specifically budgets for high needs and early intervention. The Children's Commissioner Office then worked closely with nine local authorities to develop a methodology to allocate financial data and produce a set of estimates.

The work does not provide a nationally representative picture of demand and spend intended to benefit children in England. The aim was to get a better understanding of the current cost pressures facing councils and then work with local authority children's services to co-create a common framework and methodology for mapping the level of support and spend on children and to work with a small sample of LAs to use this framework to obtain comparable data.

In the absence of a full national dataset on where money goes this study provides an important contribution to the debate on the efficiency, effectiveness and fairness of current funding.

What services are provided to children?

The Children's Commissioner worked with the nine authorities to develop a method of categorising spend in relation to intended beneficiaries across the full-range of activity within children's services. There are national data collections relating to certain parts of these services, but there is no national dataset that captures the full range of support provided to children. For example there is no data captured on children's social care help to families not within the statutory system, nor does existing data distinguish levels of need or spend within the data on children with special educational needs or for looked after children.

The work set out in this report accounted for all types spending within the purview of children's services, broken down by levels of need including 'universal support' such as school transport, support for children with special educational needs and child protection and family support. The full set of categories and spend in each averaged across the nine local authorities is shown in Figure 1. For a full breakdown of how we have defined these categories, please see page 18.

What is spent to support different children's needs?

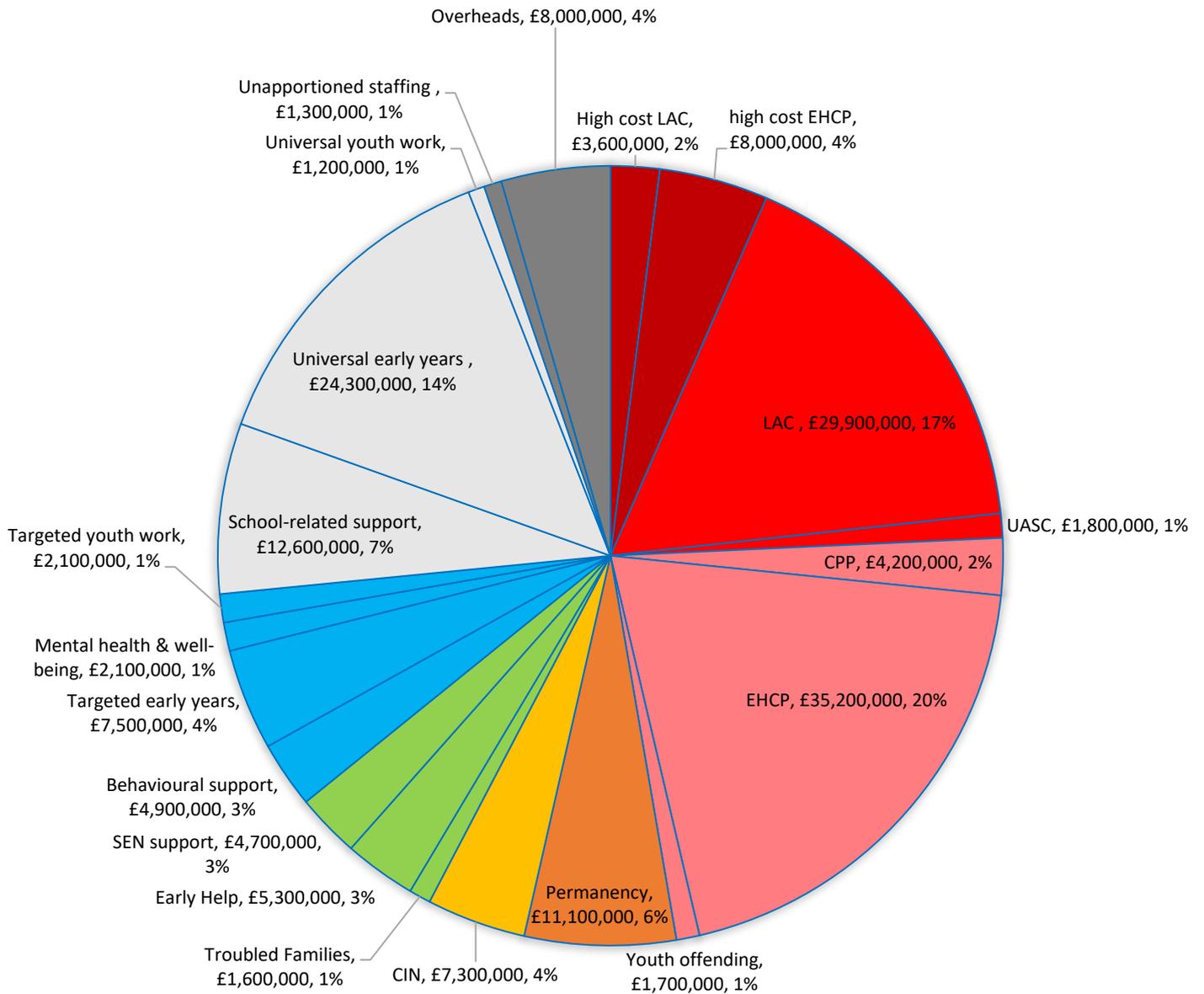


Figure 1 – Average annual children's services gross expenditure by categories of support for the nine LAs that mapped their spend with 2017/18 budget data.

How many children are getting what help?

The second stage of this work was to identify how many children were being supported by each of these categories of support. This is shown in Figure 2 below.

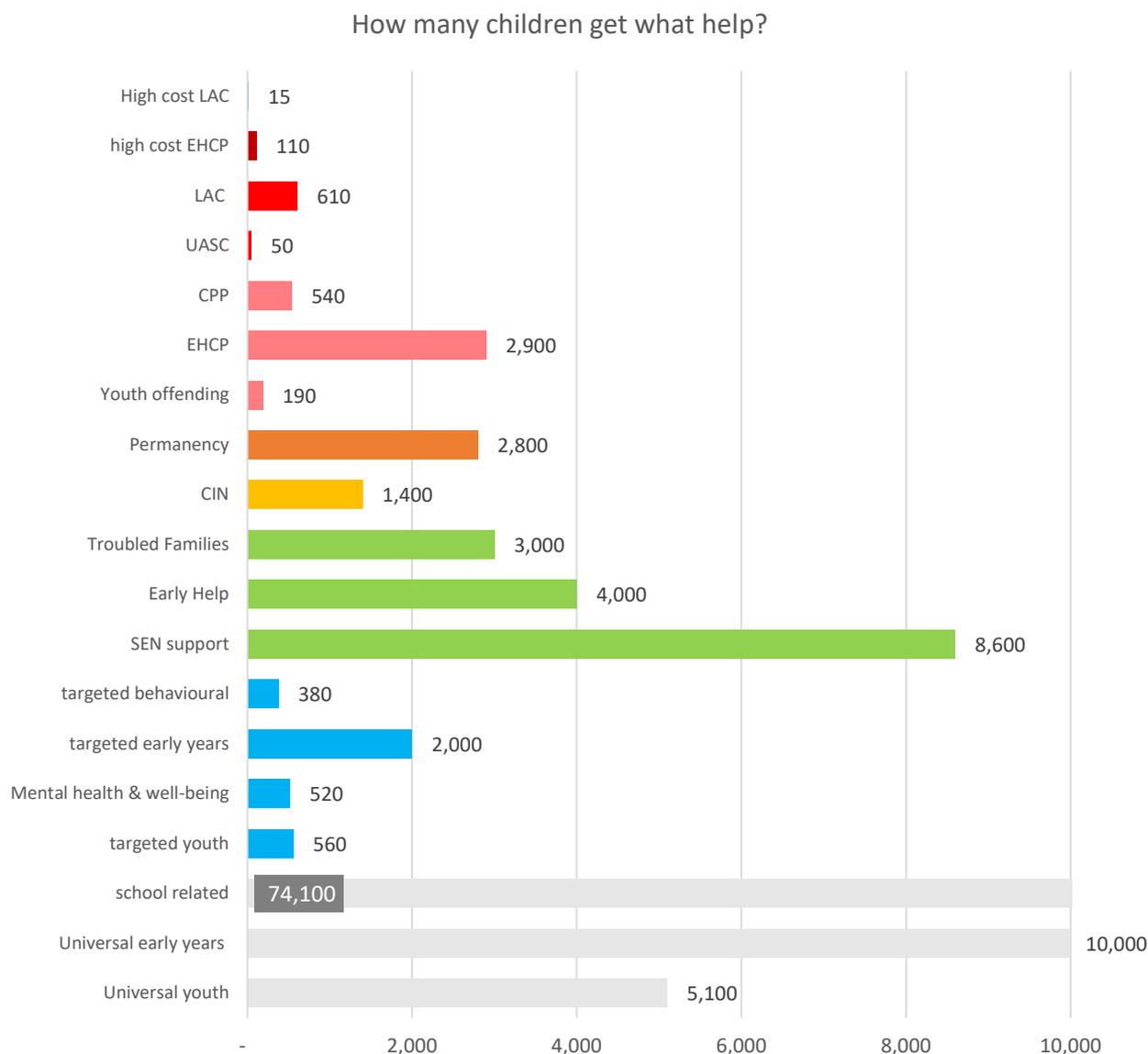


Figure 2 - Average number children supported in each category across the nine LAs in 2017-18. Note school related support is not to scale given it supports a much higher number of children.

Unsurprisingly, the largest groups of children are accessing the ‘universal support’. These are very broad services – such as school improvement and admissions – which children may not notice in their lives. Some elements of these services are more specific and important for some children, such as school transport and childcare provision. The universal early years support mostly consist of the free childcare for all 4- and 3- year olds, for which local authorities receive specific funding.

This work shows that very few children are accessing what we have termed ‘targeted support’, represented by the blue bars in the graph above. This level of support captures a range of diverse support that is aimed at definite groups or type of need. This includes ‘behavioural support’ such as provision for children excluded from school, and ‘targeted early years’ support which centres on early education for disadvantaged two year olds. As well as targeted youth support for children Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs) as well as early access mental health support.

A much greater proportion of children are accessing what we have termed ‘pre-statutory support’, shown in green in the graph above. This level of support captures a range of diverse support that is aimed at definite groups or type of need but for children and families who have not been assessed to have crossed statutory thresholds. This includes the Troubled Families Programme of keyworkers to families. It also includes the broader ‘Early Help’ offer provided by local authorities to families. This ranges from parenting classes, to long-term key worker support for families with chronic issues and lots in-between. How this is set-up varies considerably between local areas. The other area of pre-statutory support is special educational needs help in schools for children not on an education health and care plan. This could be interventions from an educational psychologist or speech or language therapist, or other support provided by the local authority.

Figure 3 below shows the children accessing services as a proportion of all children within a local authority.

What proportion of children get different support?

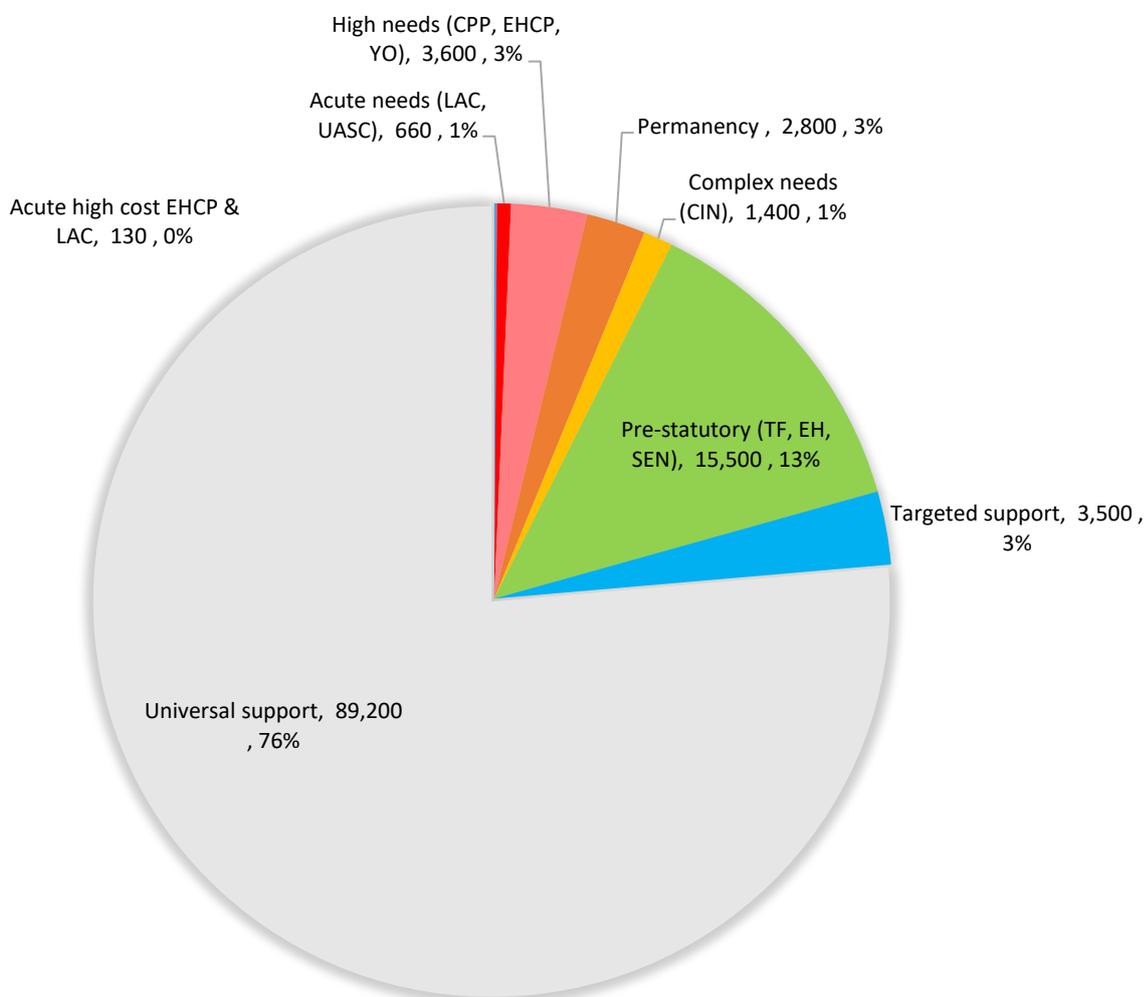


Figure 3 - Average number and proportion of supported children for each level of support by the nine LAs in 2017/18

As the graph demonstrates, the group of services we have termed ‘pre-statutory support’ are those supporting the most children who are receiving distinct services. Yet most of this support is hidden or opaque in national data collection. The S251 spending data does not attempt to estimate the number of children supported in any category of spend, but even within spending data early help support could be captured in several different budget

lines. Therefore, there is no consistent and clear data on spending on pre-statutory support. A general exception is the area of Troubled Families for which data is collected by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government on recipients.

Visits to initial engagement with local authorities identified a widespread expectation that these pre-statutory and targeted support would be substantially reduced over the next few years due to funding pressures. All Government funding for the Troubled Families programme ends in 2020.

What is the relationship between spend and provision?

These estimates were then used to link spend and the number of children supported for the different categories of need. This is shown in the graphic overleaf.

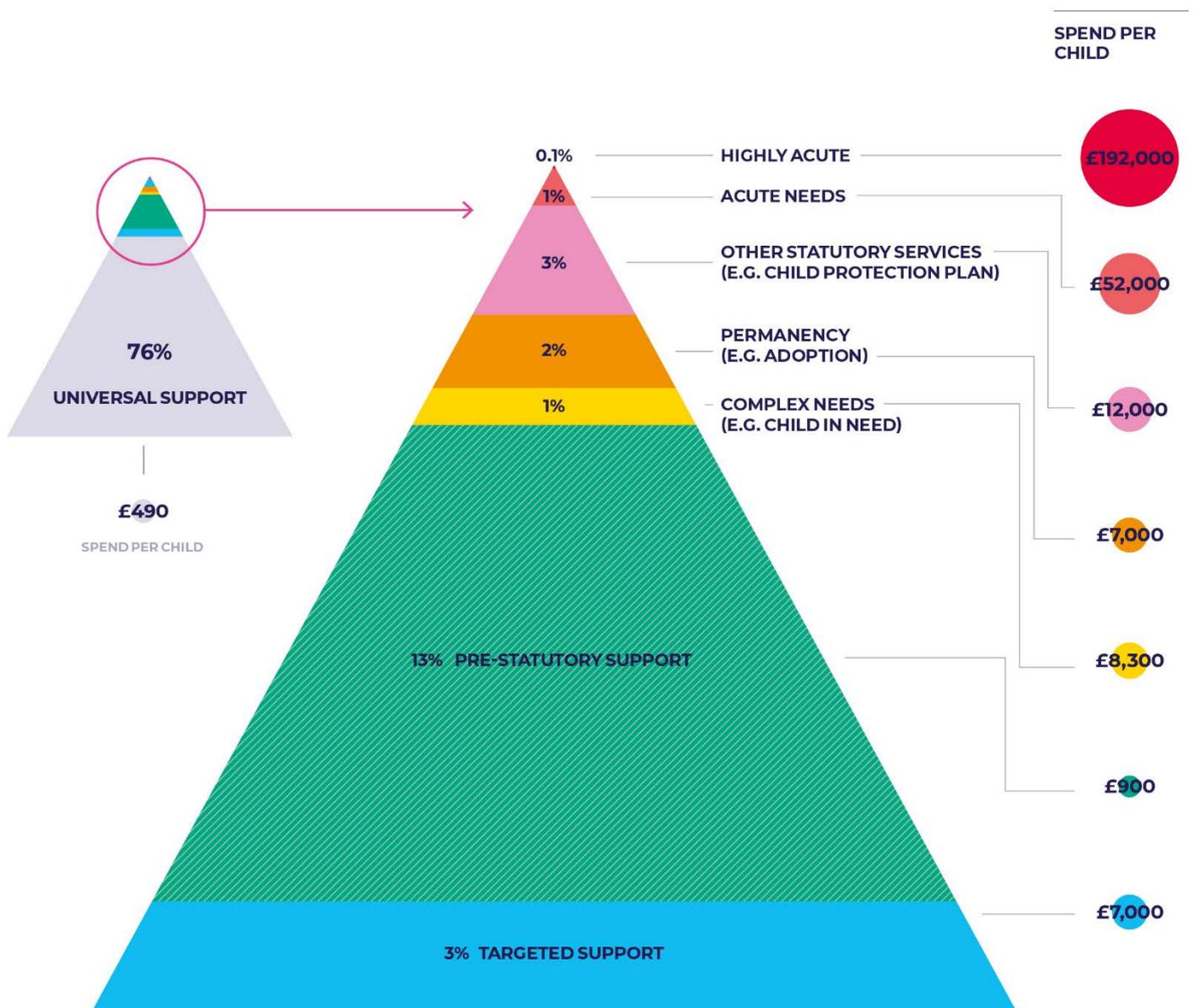


Figure 4 – Percentage of children accessing services

What are the key findings from this work?

From this work a set of key findings were developed, set out below.

Non-statutory services account for over a third of spend, but make up nine in ten children supported by children's services. Many more children are getting some type of service than measured in current national statistics. We do not have a complete picture of how many children are getting different types of help for their needs.

The report estimated that all non-statutory support (adding together pre-statutory, targeted and universal support) makes up the vast majority (93%) of all children supported by children's services – an average of just over 108,000 annually per local authority. Yet this support makes up 37% of spend, calculated at over £66 million per council annually. In contrast, all statutory support (including acute, high and complex needs as well as permanency) supports an average of 7%, around 8,600 children annually.

Local authority children's services spend is spread across a range of different types of support for children and that there is a wide range of support being given to children across all levels of need.

However:

- a) There is no national data on the entire number of children supported by children's services. With no data on the number of children supported by various levels of spend; and
- b) There are large cohorts of children who are accessing support that is not currently recognised in national data collections, for which little is known about the number of children benefiting from support, spend on these or any data on the effectiveness or impact for children.

A few cost pressures are placing a disproportionate financial strain on local authorities.

The majority (58%) of spend – an average of over £100 million a year per LA – goes to children supported by statutory support. This made up an average of 7% of all children supported by children's services, around 8,600 children annually per LA. This is neither surprising nor problematic. Both the High Needs and Children's social care budget are dedicated to children with additional needs or vulnerability.

LAs highlighted that the concentration on a very few children was causing acute financial strain. Children with highly acute needs¹ made up 0.1% of the total number of all children supported. Spending to support these children made up an average of 7% of all children's services spending - almost £12 million or £192,000 per child annually. When broken down this was:

- > 15 children on average per LA costing £260,000 per year for looked after children in high cost² residential placements.
- > 130 children on average per LA average of £87,000 per year for a child with an EHCP in high cost³ specialist provision.

It is not surprising that those with greater needs will require greater resources. However, the degree of concentration on services for a few children is a cause for concern because of the impact on other services, particularly recognising that there is little data on the experiences or outcomes of these few children.

¹ Which includes looked after children in high cost residential placements and children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision.

² We defined high cost children's social care as over £4,000 per week on in-house or private placements.

³ We defined high cost specialist provision for children in receipt of EHCP support as over £1,000 per week in term-time.

A substantial number of children receiving pre-statutory and targeted support are at high risk of losing out on these critical levels of support in the future

LAs voiced concern that pre-statutory support had been substantially cut and would see further reductions in the future as a result of increasing pressure within statutory services. This supported previous findings on the 60% reduction in spend on targeted early years and youth services.⁴

Therefore, we estimated the number of children who are receiving these forms of pre-statutory and targeted support. These figures provide a rough estimate of the number of children who are at risk of losing out of services due to spending pressures, as an average across our sample local authorities.

Pre-statutory support included:

- a) Troubled Families programme, the funding of which is due to end in March 2020. An average of 3,000 children per local authority were receiving support at £1,600 per child annually.
- b) 'Early Help' – a broad term referring to support given to families outside of the context of statutory interventions. Our work identified an average of 4,000 children per local authority were receiving support at £3,500 per child annually.
- c) SEN support. An average of 8,600 children per local were receiving support at £700 per child annually.

Targeted support included:

- a) Targeted behavioural support, such children supported when excluded from school. This supported an average of 380 children per local authority who were receiving support at £24,000 per child annually.
- b) Mental health and well-being support, which supported an average of 520 children per local authority who were receiving support at £24,000 per child annually.
- c) Targeted youth work, which made up an average of 560 children per local authority who were receiving support at £4,900 per child annually.

What are the implications of this work?

The research in this reports highlights two deficiencies in collective oversight of children's services:

- 1) No attempt is made to estimate the level of demand for children's services in terms of:
 - a. The true number of vulnerable children in England likely to require help. The Department for Education's Child in Need review,⁵ and the Children's Commissioners' Vulnerability Framework⁶ both demonstrate the large population of children who require help;
 - b. How reductions in funding to housing, welfare and other Government services could impact on demand for statutory services. This has been accepted by Ministers⁷ but the data to identify these are weak;
 - c. How reductions in other forms of children's services support impact on demand, with no clarity nationally on the number of children accessing early years support, early help services for families or youth services.

⁴ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2018) Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Public-Spending-on-Children-in-England-CCO-JUNE-2018.pdf>

⁵ Department of Education (2019) Review of children in need. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-children-in-need/review-of-children-in-need>

⁶ Children's Commissioner (2018) Children's Commissioner's annual study of childhood vulnerability in England. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/childrens-commissioner-vulnerability-report-2018/>

⁷ In evidence to the HCLG Select Committee Inquiry into Children's Services. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry12/>

- 2) There is no framework of measurement of outcomes for children's services. This means both that there is no way to consistently assess impacts and benefits for children and families, and that the system has failed to incentivise provision in the long-term interests of children.

By developing a methodology for doing this analysis in a standard way across agencies working with children these authorities have also developed a tool that might be much more widely applied. Gaps in knowledge between local authorities and agencies in health, for example, mean that there is very little clarity on how children move between the different systems.

This suggests that improving the specification of financial data to be clearly linked to specific groups of children and making better connection between this and data on children could substantially improve policy and practice knowledge about trends in need and the fit and value of services. There is a need for long-term improvements to the data, building on the methods used set out in this report.

The Children's Commissioner recommends that government collect national data on the number of children supported by local agencies for children with different needs and the amount that is spent on this support.

Introduction

Background

There is currently no accurate local or national level data on how much is spent on children with specific vulnerabilities and needs. Instead, available data is fragmented and based on funding allocations for specific services or programmes.⁸ This is a substantial problem as it limits any ability to understand the relationship between levels of spend and levels of need.

It is particularly concerning given that the latest Children’s Commissioner’s Annual Vulnerability report indicates there are 2.3 million children in England living in families with substantial complex needs, and that of these, 1.6 million children have no established, recognised form of additional support. This includes 830,000 children who are not even known to services.⁹ These vulnerable children are viewed by the Children’s Commissioner as “invisible” in so far as they do not receive statutory services, but have a need for support for which there is no evidence that it is currently provided.

The Department for Education’s ‘Child in Need’ review, showed that at least 1.6 million children in England needed statutory social care services over the 6 years to March 2018.¹⁰ This constitutes 10% of the state school population. The review showed that many of these children have a long but inconsistent relationship with children’s services. Moreover, educational outcomes tended to be poor both while they were receiving children’s services and long after. Only 17% of children who have ever been identified as a Child in Need pass maths and English GCSEs.¹¹

At the same time, a number of councils have in the past year entered emergency financial measures citing cost pressures within children’s services. In the financial year 2017/18, 91% of local authorities (LAs) overspent on their children’s services budget, to a total of £892m, more than 10% of the total budget for children’s services.¹² Work from the Local Government Association and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee both found that children’s services requires a £3.1 billion real terms increase in funding by 2025 to be sustainable.¹³

Reports from the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee were critical of the Department for Education’s lack of understanding as to what was being spent by local authorities’ on children’s social care, and what determined this spend.¹⁴ This reflects a wider challenge, also identified by NAO that “government has lacked clear and sustained strategic leadership on data.”¹⁵

⁸ For example, children receiving the 3 and 4 year old early education entitlement or the numbers of children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

⁹ The vulnerability report also provides a framework that includes a set of 70 categories, or types of aggregate vulnerabilities, risks and needs of children in England under the age of 18 which the Office uses to monitor and report to Parliament on trends in the vulnerability of children in England. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/vulnerability-in-numbers/>

¹⁰ Department of Education (2019) Review of children in need. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-children-in-need/review-of-children-in-need>

¹¹ Department of Education (2019). Children in need of help and protection, CIN review: final data and analysis. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/809108/CIN_review_final_analysis_publication.pdf

¹² National Audit Office (2019). Pressures on children’s social care. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/pressures-on-childrens-social-care/>

¹³ House of Commons: Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (2019). Funding of local authorities’ children’s services. Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19. Available at:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1638/1638.pdf>; Local Government Association, Children’s care cash crisis. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/childrens-care-cash-crisis-nine-10-councils-pushed-red>

¹⁴ National Audit Office (2019). Pressures on children’s social care. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/pressures-on-childrens-social-care/>

¹⁵ National Audit Office (2019). ‘Challenges in using data across government’. Available at

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/challenges-in-using-data-across-government/>

To identify how much is being spent on children nationally the Children’s Commissioner with the Institute for Fiscal Studies published *Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020*, which provided new estimates of total spending by the government on children in England.¹⁶ It found that in 2017/18 total spending – including benefits, education spending, services for vulnerable children and healthcare – was over £120 billion or over £10,000 per child under the age of 18. It also found a number of worrying trends between 2009/10 and 2016/17. Mainstream and acute services such as age 4-16 education and provision for children in care had been protected at the expense of targeted and pre-statutory services, such as family support and safeguarding removing vital safety nets for some very vulnerable children. In addition, spending on early and preventative interventions such as Sure Start and young people’s services, had been cut by around 60% in real terms. The report highlighted a lack of data on spending, particularly in relation to these targeted, preventative services well as national health spending.

While there has been widespread concern over cuts to children’s services, there is limited information on how the various levels of funding from government departments to support children, especially vulnerable children, is spent at a local level. Data is patchy on what different types of support children receive and how different councils fund this support. This is particularly the case for services being provided by councils to children or families not reaching the statutory level of support. This includes council’s ‘Early Help’ offer which is used to support to families and children with a range of services from parenting classes to domestic abuse and substance abuse. It also includes youth work and mental health services as well as support to children with an identified Special Educational Need or Disabilities (SEND) who does not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The fragmented nature of support for vulnerable children – operated by multiple agencies with different reporting systems – means there is a significant gap in data on the degree to which spend meets the needs of vulnerable children. This is of particular concern at a time of increasing spending pressures on local agencies. If the needs of vulnerable children are to be met adequately, the Children’s Commissioner believes there must be an ability to identify the demands on, and reasons for spend by, local agencies nationally – ultimately going beyond only local authority children’s services. In addition, the inability to make the link between spend and children means that there is little data on the impact of spending to support children, although this gap is not addressed in this report.

Aims

In response to the issues outlined above, the Children’s Commissioner set out to work with local authorities to look at three issues:

- 1) What services are currently being provided to vulnerable children;
- 2) What is spent on each of these services, and to what degree is their alignment between the needs of children and the spend by local authorities; and
- 3) What are the major determinants of spending?

In thinking about these questions, Children’s Commissioner considered the full breadth of children’s needs, conscious of the fact that the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Families Act 2014 entitle children to a broad range of support. Yet, as outlined above, only small aspects of this support is currently captured.

This report describes a first attempt by the Children’s Commissioner to work with councils to map spend in relation to children’s needs in terms of the number of children with different forms or risks of vulnerability supported at a local level. The work does not provide a nationally representative picture of demand and spend on children in England. The aim was to work with local authority children’s services to co-create a common

¹⁶ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2018) Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Public-Spending-on-Children-in-England-CCO-JUNE-2018.pdf>

framework and methodology for mapping the level of support and spend on children and to work with a small sample of LAs to use this framework to obtain comparable data.

The Children's Commissioner set about this by first visiting over a dozen LAs between November 2018 and February 2019 to gather evidence from Directors of Children's Services (DCS), elected council members, heads of finance and programme managers to discuss local pressures on children's services and specifically their high needs and early intervention budgets. Findings from these visits are set out in Chapter 2. They were also used to inform a methodology (Chapter 3) for developing consistent data on which vulnerable children receive support and the amount spend on that support. Findings from the visits were also used to interpret findings from the spend mapping work which is detailed in Chapter 4 and 5. Both of which are used to inform conclusions and policy implications of this work in Chapter 6.

The work was aimed at informing government and local agency decision making. It was specifically intended to provide evidence to inform the Children's Commissioner proposals for better investment in vulnerable children to government as part of the upcoming spending review as well as other work such as funding formulae reforms and policy development for the end of the Troubled Families Programme. The work was also intended to develop a methodology for future mapping that might be carried out with a wider group of local and national agencies.

When reading this report it should be emphasised that:

- > Spend on children includes much more than spending by local authority children's services. However, given the current concerns about funding gaps for children's services the Children's Commissioner saw the need to understand the main drivers of spending pressures on children's services and to identify what support, and which children, are most likely to be affected by these spending pressures.
- > The report may on occasion use terminology, acronyms and shorthand, which could be seen to conflate children with their location in the system or conflate the needs of children with levels of support and spending on children. This may appear clumsy when attempting to describe the complexities of a child's life, identity, needs and potential vulnerabilities. It is hoped that the value of the report in helping government and local agencies improve their understanding of the relationship between child and spending justifies shorthand and simplifications taken with the terminology and language used in this report.

Findings from work with local authorities

Following discussions with a range of local authorities, the Children's Commissioner contacted all councils in England seeking information regarding local pressures on children's services and specifically their high needs and early intervention budgets. From this, the Children's Commissioner developed a set of aims – laid out in Chapter 1. To begin to address these over a dozen LAs were visited between November 2018 and February 2019 to gather evidence from Directors of Children's Services, elected council members, heads of finance and programme managers.

Increasing financial pressures

All local authorities visited were under extreme cost pressures, which were expected to intensify. In line with findings from the Local Government Association and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, all councils felt they were unable to continue current levels of provision, including their statutory obligations in the near future.¹⁷ For most authorities this point was coming soon, and would be reached by the early 2020s. But, before that was a critical point where vital non-statutory services (early help and family support services) would have to be cut. Several local authorities felt that cutting these services could precipitate a rapid decline in the local authorities' ability to manage their caseload, as more families would end up requiring statutory support. This point for local authorities was generally within two years, and for many would be the year 2020/21, if funding for the current Troubled Families Programme is not renewed.

Councils felt pressure in different ways

While all local authorities identified immediate cost pressures, these manifested in different ways. Local authorities which were felt to be financial and administratively 'well run', with good Ofsted inspection frameworks, were struggling to maintain services. These authorities were generally very proactive in keeping costs down enabling them to offer a comprehensive service. But maintaining this level of service was increasingly difficult, and they were on the brink of cuts which they thought would spiral as it would increase pressure elsewhere. Several of these local authorities have been identified in previous research as having some of the lowest cost base in England, yet they were unequivocal that this did not mean they were in a sustainable position. This supports National Audit Office findings that there is no correlation between Ofsted rating and current level of overspend.¹⁸ This work also supports this in finding no evidence that spending pressure could be mitigated purely by more efficient management of children's services.

That does not mean that local authorities which were deemed to require improvement did not face additional cost pressures. While established local authorities were facing pressures to maintain their broader range of services, local authorities needing to make immediate improvements, faced a trifold of cost pressures:

- > A legacy of poor-management had left these authorities with a high cost base.
- > A need to invest in their core-offer to improve their ability to safeguard children. Often these resulted in a short-term reliance of agency staff, further inflating costs.
- > The need to expand the range of non-statutory services offered, both to reduce the number of children entering the statutory social care system, and to enable children and families to be 'stepped-down' from statutory services and continue to access some consistent support.

¹⁷ House of Commons: Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (2019). Funding of local authorities' children's services. Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1638/1638.pdf>; Local Government Association, Children's care cash crisis. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/childrens-care-cash-crisis-nine-10-councils-pushed-red>

¹⁸ National Audit Office (2019). Pressures on children's social care. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/pressures-on-childrens-social-care/>

Increased demand

All local authorities had encountered an increased demand for services, with most seeing a significant increase in the number of looked after children. This is borne out by national figures which show the number of children in care rising steadily since 2007.¹⁹

Discussions with councils suggested three universal factors behind this increase:

- > A retrenchment from other agencies providing services to children or their parents, largely from the voluntary sector but also police, NHS and schools. Councils felt that when other services are not available, children's services become the catch-all.
- > A greater awareness of the harms experienced by teenagers. Previously, children's services was primarily seen as a service for newborns and infants. The child sexual abuse scandals changed the approach to vulnerable adolescents. There was both increased awareness of threats to children outside the home and a different level of expectation as to how agencies should respond.
- > Because children's services are supporting more adolescents, they are also supporting more children with very complex needs, including high-levels of self-harming and substance abuse. These issues are not nearly so common with younger children in the care system.

It was believed that the underlying drivers of these pressures were within the wider population and included: deprivation, domestic violence and substance misuse.

Additionally, some local authorities were addressing specific issues causing demand to rise such as:

- > Families with complex needs being moved into the area largely from London. Sometimes this was done explicitly by another local authorities, sometimes families moved autonomously in response to changes in the benefits system such as the benefit cap or housing costs.
- > The need to accommodate unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Some local authorities were experiencing significant increases in the number of children needing support, particularly relative to their in-school population; and
- > Home-school transport, which varied considerably due to geography.

Acute and high needs cost pressures

High-cost residential placements

All local authorities reported to that the most acute financial pressure is coming from the need to find specialist residential placements for children with significant additional needs. They stated these placements typically cost more than £4,000 a week and are usually for adolescents in residential homes who are self-harming and/or display violent behaviour. Often it was stated that these children will have significant mental health and/or learning difficulties and an increasing number appear to be children who need high levels of protection from external threats such as sexual or criminal exploitation and are at a high risk of going missing.

Councils saw the costs of placements as high due to them being specialist, requiring high staff ratios and significant therapeutic intervention. Yet councils highlighted that the quality of these interventions was hard to assess.

¹⁹ Department for Education (2018) Children looked after in England including adoption: 2017 to 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018>

Local authorities stated these costs are greatly exacerbated because of a shortage of placements stating that it was not uncommon to have multiple, and sometimes dozens, of authorities bidding for one placement. Several councils reported that spend on placements for children in care has increased by as much as a third over the past two years.

Specialist children's homes cover a diverse range of placements, meeting very different needs. For this reason the homes themselves are highly specialised, making it very hard for a single local authority to forecast which placements they are likely to require. Councils suggested a need for better national and regional mapping and planning.

The shortage of placements also has a huge detrimental impact on children. The most consistent frustration from councils was a belief that the high costs incurred for residential placements were not delivering better outcomes for children. This did not mean that high-cost intensive placements could not be effective. There was widespread agreement on the need to increase the capacity of residential placements, and reform commissioning arrangements.

Other significant cost pressures

Some councils identified all

- > Recruitment – this was particularly acute for social workers, but also for other professionals working with vulnerable children including speech and language therapists and educational psychologists.
- > Independent fostering agencies (IFAs) – were particularly putting up costs in some areas. The difficulty for local authorities with a high reliance on IFAs was that having developed this market pattern, it was very difficult to reverse the pattern. Councils with very high use of in-house felt this was the result of a sustained effort over at least a decade.

High Needs

Visits to local authorities identified a dual pressure along with the pressures from the children in care budget, which was increases on the 'high needs' budget, that is, the support given to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The pressures identified were of a broadly similar nature: increased demand, particularly for more intensive support, including special schools and residential placements. Local authorities reported both increased demands for an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and a greater complexity of need for children on these plans. This in turn was placing great strain on the support delivered 'pre-statutory' to children with SEND without an EHCP, including the delivery of services to children pre-school age, and in-school support, such as behavioural and speech, language and communication support.

Pre-statutory, 'Early Help' support and Troubled Families Programme

While some councils believed that too much money was being spent on high-cost ineffective provision; all local authority stated they could identify 'Early-Help' services providing relatively low-cost and effective support. Yet there was significant frustration that these services at been cut – as shown nationally²⁰ – and were at risk from further funding cuts.

²⁰ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2018) Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Public-Spending-on-Children-in-England-CCO-JUNE-2018.pdf>

Early help support was structured in many different ways. Most local authorities offered graduated support, starting with open-access support, such as parenting programmes, usually accessed either through schools or community centres, normally through to a more intensive intervention such as domestic or substance abuse, often working in parallel to the Troubled Families Programme.

While there was significant variation and innovation between different areas. Broadly three elements were encountered:

- > Firstly, it was vital to understand that the term ‘early help’, does not mean it is necessarily the first step in children’s interaction with children’s services. Numerous local authorities emphasised the importance of early help as a ‘step-down’ down for families who have been within statutory services. Many areas also identified early-help as a long-term service for families with chronic issues, who simply could not cope without support. Because of this it was possible to have families within ‘early help’ who had more complex issues than some families where children were on Child Protection Plans.
- > Secondly, all areas identified the Troubled Families Programme as a key element of the early help offer. Most embed it within their early help offer and adapted it to suit local needs. This did not mean they did not need to supplement the programme with additional resources, but it did mean there was a mutual reliance between the two meaning cuts to one would undermine the viability of the other.
- > Thirdly, this support was where local authorities were most likely to be working in partnership with other agencies in supporting families. Several relied on the voluntary sector, other statutory agencies and even schools to deliver key parts of the work. Yet there was a lot of variation on what was provided by these agencies. For example, domestic violence interventions were sometimes paid for by adult services, the NHS, or children’s services.

A strong theme was the belief in the effectiveness of early help. While the Public Accounts Committee²¹ have strongly criticised the Department for Education for failing to properly understand the impact of early help, many local authorities felt they could demonstrate the effectiveness on the likelihood of families for accessing more intensive services.

Many councils also pointed out that these services were not just about safeguarding and preventing escalation into more intense, statutory services but were also critical to supporting families’ and a child’s wellbeing and development. They felt these interventions helped address underlying issues, rather than symptoms, and were delivered in such a way that enabled practitioners to develop positive relationships.

While local authorities were very positive about the impact of local early help and could point to a clear evidence base informing some of these interventions, for example the effectiveness of parenting programmes in supporting broader outcomes. As the Early Intervention Foundation has found,²² councils were not systematically monitoring or evaluating these interventions and none were doing it at a systemic level. The fact that nationally, there is no data collected on the spending on ‘early-help’ support; the number of children and families accessing them or their outcomes was a critical factor limiting this.

As a result, a key focus of the mapping work detailed in Chapter 3 was an attempt to identify the number of children supported by these services and what is spent on them.

²¹ Public Accounts Committee (2019) Transforming Children’s Services. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news-parliament-2017/transforming-childrens-services-report-published-17-19/>

²² Early Intervention Foundation (2019) Evaluating early help: A guide to evaluation of complex local early help systems. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/evaluating-early-help-a-guide-to-evaluation-of-complex-local-early-help-systems>

What local authorities wanted

Local authorities who participated in this research were universally feeling the most acute cost pressures within statutory services, which they expected to continue to require more money over the next few years. The pressure was most acute in relation to looked after children who required specialist residential placements and children with EHCP in specialist provision. Yet all councils wanted to invest additional resources into pre-statutory and targeted support. Exactly what this looked like depended on the local area, but the issues most commonly identified were:

An expansion of family support to enable:

This included:

- > More consistent support for families. A recurrent theme was the need to provide long-term help for families with chronic issues. Councils believed that the current system, especially statutory services, incentivised short-term interventions for what were normally long-term issues. Consistent work, based on co-operative relationship between family and support worker, was believed to be needed to bring better outcomes for the children and family.
- > Help to more families. All local authorities were aware of a cohort of children living in family situations which were chaotic to a degree to which they were impeding the child's development, but not posing a sufficient immediate threat to the child to warrant interventions. Given the resources, most local areas felt there was effective work which could be done to the benefit of these children.

Youth services

All areas had cut their youth service, some entirely. This is in line with a 60% cut in youth services nationally.²³ This left children's services with little contact with teenagers below statutory thresholds, and often without the tools to help influence these children's lives. This particularly impacted on marginalised and isolated children who were in risky situations, but not in so much risk as to require a statutory intervention. Yet the absence of such support for children at low-risk, made it harder to work with children at high-risk. Most councils felt that if they were to re-build their youth service, they would not replicate the service previously put in place. But that effectively building up a new service would enable significant innovation.

Greater work with partners

In particular:

- > Investment in the voluntary sector. As pressure within statutory services had increased, most areas (not just children's services) had reduced their funding for the voluntary sector. Most authorities were looking at ways to provide non-monetary support to the voluntary sector. It was widely acknowledged that the voluntary sector could be better placed to engage with some children and families, but it was also vital that they worked with the authority, shared risk and received challenge.
- > More support for schools – the support schools was giving to children and families varied within and between areas. That said, many local authorities believed they had good partnership working with

²³ Spending on young people's services has fallen by about 60% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2016–17. Institute for Fiscal Studies (2018) Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Public-Spending-on-Children-in-England-CCO-JUNE-2018.pdf>

schools, particularly within the early help service. In some cases this extended to schools co-ordinating teams around the child. Engagement through schools was thought to drive self-referrals and co-operation and was felt to be a cost-effective way to deliver services, but it was felt they needed support to do this.

Methodology

Nine councils worked with the Children's Commissioner to co-create a methodology to map the number of children with different forms or risks of vulnerability supported by their children's services alongside the spend on these children identified in local authority financial data. Development of the methodology also included sector input from other local authorities, academics, government departments and expert stakeholders²⁴ who advised on the challenges of understanding and measuring spending on vulnerable children and its relationship to levels of need.

We worked closely with our partner local authorities children's services heads of finance, senior accountants, finance and information managers to develop a methodology using the data available. We established conventions that provided consistency on issues that could be approached in a range of ways. In future work the methodology will be revisited to assess a wide range of options but for this initial work it was important to establish a coherent and achievable framework.

Developing a framework for mapping

Using the Children's Commissioner vulnerability framework of 71 types of vulnerability, need or risk²⁵ a framework was co-developed with LAs to generate a tractable set of categories that could be used in the mapping exercise. This is shown in Figure 1 in terms of *levels of support* (represented by separate coloured headings) and within them *categories of support* (represented by the groups detailed beside each coloured heading and outlined in detail below). These categories were used in the mapping exercise. LAs estimated the total spend and the number of children supported within each category.

²⁴ Many of whom are named in the acknowledgements of this report.

²⁵ Children's Commissioner (2018) Children's Commissioner's annual study of childhood vulnerability in England. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/childrens-commissioner-vulnerability-report-2018/>

Mapping framework

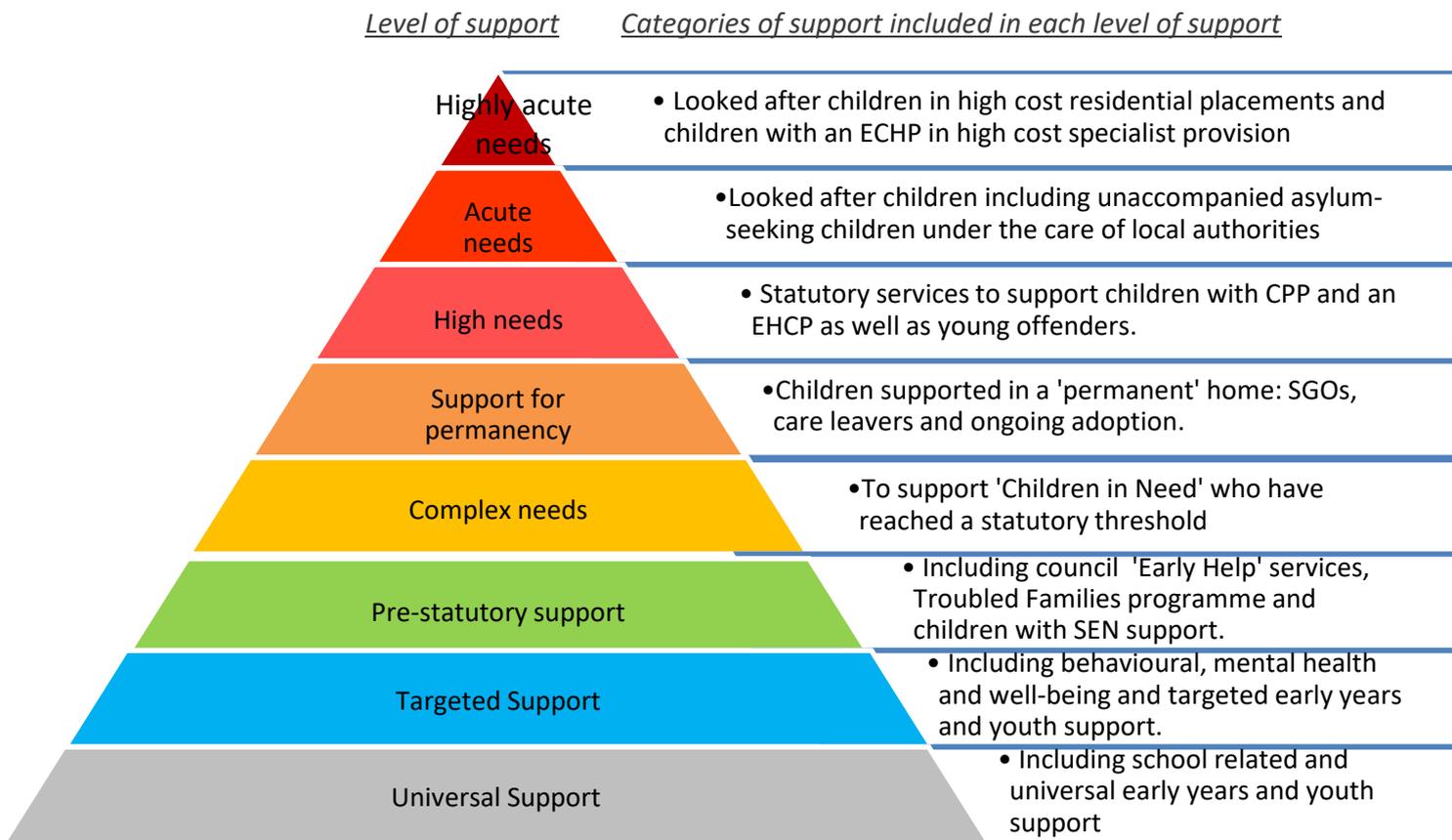


Figure 4 – mapping framework. Acronyms: Child Protection Plans (CPP); Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCP); Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs); Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Figure 1 is a visual presentation of a conceptual framework for categorising children in terms of need and nature of support. It was developed with LAs with the intention that it could be used consistently across councils participating in the work. Categories in the framework are in some respects different to those used by national and local government agencies. This was a deliberate attempt to emphasise the mapping of *support for children with specific needs* rather than *services* and *programmes*. Nevertheless, some categories are defined in this way. For example, the Troubled Families' Programme.

There are a number of important limitations to recognise in understanding the mapping framework. It must be acknowledged that:

- > It is not an exhaustive list of children's needs, vulnerabilities and risks;
- > In order to create tractable categories which could be used in the mapping, assumptions and simplifications have been made on the nature and type of children's needs and vulnerabilities. This was not intended to simplify or disregard the differences and complexities in children's needs but to help create a consistent approach to mapping support by children's services;
- > Spend on children includes much more than spending by local authorities' children's services;
- > Children can be in multiple categories at any one time and children move in, out and between different categories and even levels at various different time points. Families might have children in multiple categories or levels;

- > The thresholds are different for different categories of support and are not entirely spend based. For example, some categories include young people for whom councils have a statutory responsibility up to the age of 25 (such as children with an EHCP and care leavers), whereas in other categories the responsibility is only to the age of 18; and
- > Support was only included where it was given by children's services with the aim of supporting children. Some family level interventions that are not funded by children's services may have been omitted.

Levels and categories of support

This section sets out a description – and in some instance rationale – for each level of support (represented by underlined headings) and within them definitions of the **categories of support** (bolded sub-heading) used in the mapping and throughout this report.

Highly acute

All LAs reported that the most acute financial pressure on children's services budget was from specialist, residential placements for children in care with significant additional needs. Councils noted that these are often for children who are self-harming and or display violent behaviour who also have significant mental health and/or learning difficulties. An increasing number appear to be for children who need high levels of protection from external threats such as sexual or criminal exploitation; many of whom are at a high risk of going missing. Spend to support these children was high due to these being specialist placements, requiring high staff ratios and significant therapeutic intervention. They stated these costs are greatly exacerbated because of a shortage of placements and it is not uncommon to have multiple, and sometimes dozens, of authorities bidding for one placement.

Therefore, this category is separated out from the wider category of 'looked after children' and defined as:

- > **Looked after children in high cost residential placements:** Children in care where the council spends over £4,000 a week on in-house public or private placements; usually outside of the local authority. A spend threshold was given to create consistency across the LAs. However, it is acknowledged that spend will be impacted on by cost variations across the country.

Councils also highlighted the rising financial pressures on their high needs budget to support children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) needing specialist provision. Therefore, this category of children was separated out and defined as:

- > **Children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision:** children having a identified SEND with an EHCP aged up to 25 (in line with LAs statutory responsibility) where the council spends over £1,000 a term-time week (38 weeks a year) for specialist provision. Again, a spend threshold was given to create consistency across the LAs; but it is acknowledged that spend will be impacted on by cost variations across the country.

Acute needs

- > **Looked after children:** Children in care up to the age of 25 in line with LAs statutory responsibility who are in placements in a children's home, are in semi-independent living or foster care up. This excludes looked after children in high cost residential placements.
- > **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children:** children or young people up to the age of 25 who have been given unaccompanied asylum-seeking child status. This category was separated from looked after children due to the different statutory responsibilities and funding streams.

High needs

Statutory services to support children which includes the categories of:

- > **Children with an Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP):** children or young people up to the age of 25 (in line with LA statutory responsibilities) who have an EHCP. This category excludes those in the SEND high cost specialist provision.
- > **Children with a Child Protection Plan (CPP):** children or young people with Child Protection Plans (CPP).
- > **Young offenders:** children or young people who have been convicted of a crime and for whom the LA has statutory responsibility.

Support for permanency

- > **Permanency:** Children and young people who are being supported in a 'permanent' home that is not with their birth parents.. This includes children who have been adopted; care leavers many of whom remain with foster parents through 'staying-put' arrangements and children who move into a 'special guardianship order'(SGO) with their foster family, but to whom the local authority continues to make payments in lieu of a fostering allowance.

Complex needs

- > **Children in Need (CiN):** children or young people who have been identified as a 'Child in Need' under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and on the Child in Need register.

Pre-statutory support

The framework also captures support that is given to children who did not reach the statutory threshold for statutory services but to whom support is given for a similar type of need to the statutory support, namely:

- > **Early Help support:** children or young people who have been supported by council's 'Early Help' offer to families. This includes a diverse array of services and interventions for families varies considerably between local areas. These range from parenting classes to long-term key worker support for families with chronic issues as domestic violence, substance abuse and could include services such as PAUSE. It could also include where families have been through a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or a Front Door assessment but have not been identified as a needing statutory support.
- > **Troubled Families Programme:** children or young people who have been supported by the Troubled Families Programme.
- > **SEN support:** children or young people who have been identified as having a SEND but do not have an EHCP.

Targeted support

This level of support captures a range of diverse support that is aimed at definite groups or type of need but for children and families who have not been assessed to have crossed statutory thresholds.

These are grouped into four distinct categories based on types of need and the support provided to children:

- > **Targeted behavioural support:** children in Pupil Referral Units and other behaviour, attendance/exclusions related services. The category also includes children supported through Discretionary Learner Support and post-16 participation.
- > **Targeted early years support:** targeted support for children aged between birth and school entry. This

includes the two-year-old free early education and childcare entitlement. It also includes three and four year olds receiving support from the early years pupil premium as well as any support for pre-school children which was not directly funded through SEN support such as speech and language therapy. For some councils this included specific interventions or programmes via Sure Start and Children's Centres that were not universal.

- > **Mental health and well-being support:** support for children and young people for mental health issues. This is mainly Tier 1 and 2 support rather than more acute CAHMS support which is usually NHS funded. It does however include spend by children's services on jointly commissioned (with the NHS) mental health and well-being support. In addition, it includes well-being or pupil support as well as respite services for families and any support for young carers.
- > **Targeted youth support:** targeted youth interventions or programmes including those for children 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEETs). This category also includes children supported by youth offending or prevention services and who have not been convicted, i.e. distinct from the young offenders category.

Universal support

This level of support captures the diverse range of universal support for all children. These are grouped into three broad categories based on children's age or setting and the type of support provided:

- > **Universal school related support:** support to schools by children's services outside of the core function schools performed on which children's services have discretion, for example support for home to school transport, admissions, or music provision.
- > **Universal early years support:** support for children prior to schooling such as the free early education and care universal 15 hours entitlement (and 30 hours for working parents) for 3 and 4 year olds. It also included spend on universal elements of Sure Start and Children's Centres.
- > **Universal youth support:** support for all children of school age such as youth centres and out of school or holiday activities and support.

Methodology for mapping spend

The nine local authority children's services iteratively devised a protocol (summarised in this section) as well as a template for mapping the number of children in each group and what is spent on this group using finance data.

Spend data allocation

Spend data was provided by local authorities via a list of all children's services 2017/18 actual spend²⁶ broken down by budget lines. Finance leads worked with service managers and business intelligence colleagues throughout their children's services departments to allocate and apportion these budget lines to appropriate categories of support for children based on their judgement about local provision.

2017/18 budget actuals were used as the latest and most complete source of finance data available that had been audited and verified within local authorities.

²⁶ Which included year end gross expenditure (split by: employee Related; Premises Related Expenses; Transport Related Expenses; Supplies & Services; Contracted Services; Transfer Payments; Central Dept. & Technical Support; Capital Charges) and year end gross income (split by: Grant Income & Contributions; Internal Charges; and Other Income)

Out of scope

All children's services spending allocated to children for which children's services had discretion on how funds were spent was in scope. There were two main types of children's services spend that was considered out of scope and excluded from the spending estimates:

- 1) **Spending beyond the remit of children's services**, for example, adult physical and sensory support or adult learning, which in some instances was funded from children's services budgets.
- 2) **Services for which children's services did not have discretion over spend**. This included:
 - i. Core spending by schools allocated to LAs from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and on Private Finance Initiative spending where children's services did not have any influence over the allocation of this spending. Where children's services did have discretion on DSG spending, these were made explicitly in scope. These included spending to support schools such as educational welfare services, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and home to school transport.
 - ii. Public health spending where children's services did not have discretion on spending, such as health visitors. As with schools funding, only public health spend which directly funded children's services programmes or services where children's services had discretion on funding was included as in scope.
 - iii. Other non-discretionary items such as for children in families with no recourse to public funds or pensions and legacy redundancies.

Overheads

As the objective of the mapping was to get as much clarity as possible on the quantum of children's services spend for each of the categories of children, all budget lines in scope (for which children's services has discretion on spending) were allocated. This meant that some of the budget lines which would in other methodologies have been placed in overheads, were allocated to the associated category of children they supported. The remainder was apportioned to overheads, for funding over which children's services did have discretion on spend but for which LAs were not able to allocate to a specific category of children. This was mainly formed of core corporate service spend such as human resources, information technology, legal, research and corporate systems change. This remaining unallocated spend on overheads was included in the total spend calculations as a separate category.

It is important to note that this does not provide a method for estimating true overheads relative to overall spend and instead is a method for obtaining the most accurate level of spend to support children in each category in the framework, which was the concern of this work.

Staffing spend

Spending on staff was allocated in one of two ways, both of which were included in the total spend calculations.

- 1) Frontline staff budget lines, for example social workers and family support workers were allocated to associated categories of support for children by LAs. This included for example spending on professional development, training and supervision. This was broken out into distinct categories if this was related to staff who clearly supported children with different level of support, based on discussions with children's services managers who ran the services and staff in business intelligence. It was recognised that each LA worked differently in terms of the staff time working to support children. For example, councils differ substantially in the proportion of social worker time allocated to work with children who have a CPP, are identified as a 'Child in Need', or for children outside these groups. Therefore, the approach allowed for a bottom-up process of allocating staff spend to get the most

accurate estimation of the level of spend in each category of support.

- 2) Spend on children's services staff who were not part of frontline services were apportioned to the relevant support based on the same method as for frontline staff. LAs devised a list of staff spend that could not be assigned. This included safeguarding boards, heads of social care, commissioning and performance teams as well as chief social workers. To ensure consistency these were apportioned in an 'unapportioned staffing' spend category, included in the total spend allocations as a separate category as with overheads.

Gross/net expenditure and income/grants

The aim of this work was to estimate total children's services spend on children based on their needs regardless of the source. Therefore, gross expenditure is used throughout as the main unit of financial data analysis.

Information on income was collected and used to calculate *net expenditure* (gross expenditure minus income). We also estimated *net expenditure inclusive of grants* but minus income from internal charges and other local income. Findings on "net expenditure" and "net expenditure inclusive of grants" can be found in Annex 1 Table 16.

Methodology for estimating the number of children supported by category

In order to estimate the number of children supported in each category, council finance leads worked with service managers and business intelligence colleagues throughout their children's services departments to obtain the most accurate local data source on the number of children. This was done for each category of children supported in financial year 2017/18 and corresponding to the age of the statutory remit of the support.²⁷

It is important to note here that:

- > Children can be in multiple categories at any one time and that children move into, out of and between different categories and levels. Therefore, a degree of double counting, particularly between universal support and other categories of support, is inevitable.
- > Steps were taken to ensure a consistent approach by having categories as distinct as possible from each other. However, categories that included different sources of data either used: a) the numbers supported were added together where they were distinct from each other or b) the category with the largest number of children supported was used. For example, for early years this could be all those receiving the free early years entitlement in 2017/18. This will ultimately have led to some inconsistency, particular with poorer sources of data and could have resulted in an under- or over-estimation of the numbers of children within these categories.
- > There will be some differences in the number of children supported between LAs due to the way support is delivered. For example, universal youth support in some councils will only include youth centres, whereas in others it will also include support for holiday activities, youth parliaments, Duke of Edinburgh activities.

Data assessment

Local authorities used the most accurate source of data available to them to map the number of children within each category of support. To assess whether the source of data was an adequate representation of the number of children in each category a set of criteria was devised and data sources assessed by councils and the Children's Commissioner.

²⁷ For example, children's services have a statutory requirement for children with an EHCP, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and care leavers up to the age of 25 year old. Therefore, data on the number of children supported in these categories includes young people up to the age of 25.

As shown in Table 1, the highest data sources were rated as ones which used data which represented all children on a full-time equivalent basis across the financial year (2017/18) that had received support as defined by the category in the framework. Data which represented support for children across the full financial year would be one level below with data which gave the number of children supported at one point in the 2017/18 financial year – a ‘snapshot’, usually a census date or at the end of the financial year – was categorised at a lower level. Data which was for a full financial year or a calendar year, but not for 2017/18 financial year was categorised as ‘adequate’ and data from a snapshot which was not 2017/18 was rated as ‘poor’.

Table 1- Assessment criteria for data on the numbers of children supported

Assessment level	Threshold for assessment	count ²⁸	% of total
Very good	Full-time equivalent for 2017/18 financial year (FY)	14	8%
Good	Data across 2017/18 FY	42	25%
Moderate	Snapshot (either end of the FY or a census date)	72	42%
Adequate	Data for a FY or calendar year of a different period	23	13%
Poor	Activity data from a snapshot or constructed from other sources from a different time period	2	1%
NO DATA	no level of data could be found for the category	18	11%

It should be noted that this assessment of data is not the same as data accuracy because errors of a different kind will result from the difficulties of allocating spend to specific groups of children. Future work will need to look at this in more detail.

Overall, given that the data is from a wide range of sources, the level of data obtained rated as relatively good in terms of the observable characteristics in Table 1, although far from perfect. As shown in Table 1, added together, three quarters of the data was assessed as at or above a level of ‘moderate’, having data for 2017/18. A quarter of the data was assessed as below the level of ‘moderate’. Within this 13% was assessed as ‘adequate’ (being across a year but of a different time period, usually 2018/19) and 11% where there was no data supplied by the local authority.

Table 2 sets out the assessed rating for each category across the sample of nine LAs. It shows that:

- > Most LAs in the sample have a very good level of data on children the number of children in the social care system, particularly in the more high needs categories such as children in care, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children with a CPP and children supported in their ‘permanency’. This was understandable given the obligations on councils to report many of these to the Department for Education with many of these being linked to funding. This is also the case for children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision, believed to be due to the small numbers of children in this group receiving very specialist support.
- > Data on children with high needs support such as children having an EHCP, young offenders and children identified as having SEN support is of a lower level but still assessed as ‘moderate’. Again, this was believed to be due to obligations on reporting to central government.
- > Data on children supported by council’s ‘Early Help’ services, within the Troubled Families Programme and children identified as a ‘Child in Need’ is much more irregular. This was believed to be because there was no census taken of these numbers with early help being made up of many services and

²⁸ This is a count each data source for all the categories for all the LAs.

children could be receiving multiple numbers of these interventions.

- > Data on early years and behavioural, and school related support is generally moderate, mainly due to school and early years data returns which are linked to Department for Education funding. However, there is a large amount of missing data on the number of children supported by other targeted support such as mental health and well-being support and youth support. It was believed that this could partly be because of the multiple types of interventions and services in these categories, as well as the fact that many were often jointly commissioned with other agencies with reporting data in some instances not being held by children's services.
- > Universal youth support had the highest degree of missing data on the number of children supported. LAs noted that this was mainly due to the limited types of support that are now universally available to young people.

Table 2 - Assessed level of data for each category of children supported for each LA in the sample

	LA: A	LA: B	LA: C	LA: D	LA: E	LA: F	LA: G	LA: H	LA: I
LAC high cost residential	Very good	Very good	Moderate.	Very good	Moderate	Moderate	Very good	Good	Very good
EHCP high cost specialist	Very good	Very good	Moderate.	Very good	Moderate	Very good	Very good	NO DATA	Very good
LAC	Very good	Adequate [2019]	Moderate.	Very good	Good	Moderate	Very good	Good	Good
UASC	Very good	Adequate [2019]	Moderate	Very good	Good	Moderate	Very good	NO DATA	Good
CPP	Very good	Adequate [2019]	Adequate [Dec2018]	Good	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Good	Good
EHCP	Moderate	Adequate [2019]	Moderate	Good	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Youth offending	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Good	Adequate [2018-19]	Accurate	Good	Moderate	Adequate [2018-19]
Permanency	Good	Adequate [2019]	Adequate [Dec2018]	Good	Accurate	Moderate	Moderate	Good	Good
CIN	Adequate [2019]	Good	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Good	NO DATA	Adequate
Troubled Families	Moderate	Adequate [2019]	Adequate [Dec2018]	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Poor [2017]	Adequate [2019]	Poor [2015-2019]
Early Help	Good	Moderate	NO DATA	Good	Moderate	Good	NO DATA	Adequate	Moderate
SEN support	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Targeted behavioural	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Adequate
Targeted early years	Good	Good	Moderate.	Good	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Mental health & well-being	Moderate	NO DATA	NO DATA	Adequate	Moderate	Adequate	Good	NO DATA	NO DATA

Targeted youth work	Adequate [2019]	Adequate [July-Dec2018]	Moderate	Good	Adequate	Moderate	NO DATA	NO DATA	Adequate [2019]
School related	Moderate	Moderate	Adequate	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Universal early years	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Universal youth work	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	Moderate	NO DATA	Good	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA

Note: dates in brackets give the time point for the data that is used.

Sample

While this work was not intended to be nationally representative of councils in England, data on key characteristics of the nine LAs in the sample were compared against national averages in England.

Geographic and demographic spread

Overall, the geographic and demographic characteristics of the sample of nine LAs that took part in the mapping exercise largely mirrored the picture nationally, although as would be expected with a sample of this size there are important differences. Table 3 shows that the sample had a reasonably representative mix of urban/rural areas, though with a slightly lower number of more urban LAs and fewer rural LAs in the sample than nationally. Table 4 shows the sample had a good mix in terms of some aspects of geography with similar proportions of London and Metropolitan areas in the sample compared to nationally. Table 5 shows that the regional spread of LAs in the sample followed the nation spread very closely.

Table 3 – Distribution of sample by urban - rural classification²⁹

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
Predominantly Urban	5	56%	72%
Predominantly Rural	2	22%	14%
Urban with Significant Rural	2	22%	14%

Table 4 - Unitary geographic classification³⁰

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
County	4	44%	18%
London Borough	2	22%	22%
Metropolitan District	1	11%	24%
Unitary Authority	2	22%	37%

Table 5 - Region classification³¹

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
London	2	22%	24%
South East	1	11%	13%
East of England	1	11%	6%
North West	1	11%	14%
South West	1	11%	10%
North East	0	0%	8%
Yorkshire & Humber	1	11%	11%
West Midlands	0	0%	9%
East Midlands	2	22%	5%

²⁹ National data source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes>

³⁰ National data source: http://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/31b99124263b4c08bb5581e62ffb7109_0

³¹ National data source: http://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/c457af6314f24b20bb5de8fe41e05898_0

Table 6 shows the distribution of deprivation in sampled LAs (in terms of Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index average score) is fairly similar to the national distribution. Table 7 shows the size of the child population in the sample (in terms of the 2018 population estimate of 0-17 year old children) broadly mirrors the national picture, though there is an over-representation of LAs with large 0-17 populations.

Table 6 - Deprivation classification³²

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
Least deprived (bottom 25%)	0	0%	5%
Below national average	5	56%	51%
Above national average	4	44%	49%
Most deprived (top 25%)	2	22%	7%

Table 7 - Population estimates 2018³³

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
Small (25% smallest)	1	11%	21%
Below average	4	44%	71%
Above average	5	56%	29%
Large (25% largest)	4	44%	16%

LA sample spread of looked after children and children with identified SEND

Looking at the rates of children in care and proportion of looked after children in residential or secure placements of the sample of nine LAs in Table 8 there was a fairly close spread in the sample of rates of looked after children compared to the national average. Table 9 shows that the sample included a higher proportion than nationally of areas with below average proportions of children in care in residential/secure placements.

Table 8 - Rate of looked after children per 10,000 population (2018)³⁴

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
Bottom 25%*	0	0%	4%
Below national average	5	56%	43%
Above national average	4	44%	57%
Top 25%	2	22%	15%

³² Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index - average score. National data source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>

³³ Mid-year population estimate of children in 2018. National data source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>

³⁴ In 2018 the national average of looked after children was 64 per 10,000. *note 22% of LAs (2) were in the bottom 26% of the national average. National data source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018>

Table 9 – Proportion of looked after children in residential or secure placements³⁵

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
Bottom 25%	1	11%	6%
Below national average	7	78%	60%
Above national average	2	22%	40%
Top 25%	1	11%	10%

In terms of the proportion of pupils with an EHCP (Table 10), the sample broadly mirrored national proportions, with lower numbers of children with an EHCP below the average than above. This was also the case when looking at pupils with SEN support in Table 11.

Table 10 – Proportion of pupils with statements or EHC plans³⁶

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
Bottom 25%	0	0%	2%
Below national average	3	33%	44%
Above national average	6	67%	56%
Top 25%	0	0%	1%

Table 11 - Proportion of pupils with SEN support³⁷

	Sample count	Sample %	National %
Bottom 25%	0	0%	0%
Below national average	2	22%	47%
Above national average	7	78%	53%
Top 25%	0	0%	0%

Overall, Tables 3 to 7 show that the nine LAs in the sample are largely representative of councils in England in terms of observed demographic and geographic characteristics. Tables 8 to 11 also indicate that the sample is broadly representative of the proportion of children with complex and high need in LAs throughout England. Given that the sample included only nine LAs, data on average spend and number of children supported cannot be seen as nationally or statistically representative of all 152 LAs in England. However, given the spread of LAs and an overall good level of data on the numbers of children supported there is no evidence to suspect that the estimates given in this report are

³⁵ At 31 March 2018. National average proportion of looked after children in residential/secure placements national was 13%. This included: secure units, children’s homes and semi-independent living accommodation; other residential settings; residential schools. National data source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018>

³⁶ In January 2018. The national average of pupils with statements or EHCP was 2.9%. National data source: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732424/SEN_2018_LA_tables.xlsx

³⁷ In January 2018. The national average of pupils with SEN support was 11.7%. National data source: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732424/SEN_2018_LA_tables.xlsx

fundamentally biased in any one direction.

Mapping limitations

A number of points should be noted when interpreting the findings set out in this report.

Although 2017/18 financial year actuals were used by LAs as the latest and most complete source of finance data available, the data is not longitudinal and therefore cannot be used to assess trends. While the data could be subject to anomalies in the 2017/18 financial year, evidence gathered from LA visits suggests that 2017/18 data is part of a consistent trend of increasing numbers of children identified as having high needs at the same time of decreasing children's service budgets. LAs in the sample were at pains to point out that they find themselves currently (2019) in an even more pressured financial position than in 2017/18. This is supported by evidence outlined in Chapter 1.

Council's used budget actuals to map spend to categories of children. Given the diversity in how financial data is reported by different children's services departments across the country, there will be a degree of inconsistency. The methodology was developed closely with LAs so as to be achievable using existing data sources. A detailed protocol was used. Therefore, it is believed that these inconsistencies will have been minimised and that the report's conclusions are not strongly affected by inconsistency. We also think that similar estimates would have been obtained if another good spread of LAs was used to map spend.

Data on the number of children supported in each category is also subject to a degree of inconsistency and potential inaccuracies, not least as data is from multiple sources within children's services and is often from the council's own data management systems and therefore very diverse. However, in some instances where LAs could not identify in-house data sources, verified and official statistics were used - usually in the form of census data - to achieve consistency across councils. While much of the data on the number of children supplied by LAs was representative of all children supported across the financial year, particularly for children's social care, early years and school data sources; data on the number of children receiving pre-statutory and some targeted and universal support was much more inconsistent in coverage.

Finally, it should be noted that other than through LAs own internal auditing and quality assurance, the data provided by LAs has not been independently validated or verified. This is returned to in Chapter 5 - Conclusions.

Overall findings

This section presents overall estimates devised from the mapping exercise that nine councils undertook, as set out in Chapter 3.

For the 2017/18 financial year Table 12 shows average gross expenditure for each category. It also reports the average proportion of gross expenditure allocated to each category across the sample of LAs, the average numbers of children in each category as well as the per child spend for each category of support.³⁸ See Annex 1 for analysis by net expenditure and net expenditure inclusive of grants, Table 15.

Table 12 – Average annual (2017/18) spend and the numbers of children supported in the sample of LAs.

	Average gross expenditure	Average percentage of total gross expenditure	Average number of children supported ³⁹	Average per child spend
LAC high cost residential	£3,600,000	2%	15	£260,000
EHCP high cost specialist	£8,000,000	5%	110	£87,000
LAC	£29,900,000	18%	610	£53,000
UASC	£1,800,000	1%	50	£38,000
CPP	£4,200,000	2%	540	£9,300
EHCP	£35,200,000	19%	2,900	£14,000
Youth offending	£1,600,000	1%	190	£10,000
Permanency	£11,100,000	6%	2,800	£7,000
CIN	£7,300,000	5%	1,400	£8,300
Troubled Families	£1,600,000	1%	3,000	£1,600
Early Help	£5,300,000	3%	4,000	£3,500
SEN support	£4,700,000	3%	8,600	£700
Targeted behavioural	£4,900,000	3%	380	£24,000
Targeted early years	£7,500,000	4%	2,000	£5,300
Mental health & well-being	£2,100,000	1%	520	£24,000
Targeted youth	£2,200,000	1%	560	£4,900
School related	£12,600,000	7%	74,100	£200
Universal early years	£24,300,000	13%	10,000	£2,400
Universal youth	£1,200,000	1%	5,100	£800
Unapportioned staffing	£1,300,000	1%		
Overheads	£8,000,000	4%		
TOTAL	£178,400,000	100%	116,800	

³⁸ Calculated for each authority by dividing the average number of children within each category by average annual gross expenditure for that category, and then averaging across authorities

³⁹ For the 2017/18 financial year to correspond to financial data from 2017/18. More information can be found in Chapter 3.

Overall, it shows that average local authority children's services gross expenditure for the nine local authorities was just under £180 million in 2017/18. It also shows that average annual spending is hugely diverse and spread across a large number of different categories of support.

Table 12 shows that highest aggregates of gross expenditure goes on support for:

- 1) Children with an Education and Health and Care plan (EHCP), at over £35 million – almost a fifth (19%) of total spend annually;
- 2) Looked after children, at almost £30 million annually: 18% of total spend;
- 3) Pre-school children through universal early years provision at over £24 million (13% of total annual spend). The majority of which came from spend on the free early education or childcare entitlements for three and four year olds;
- 4) School pupils universally supported with school related activities such as for home to school transport and school admissions at £12.6 million annually which was 7% of total spend; and
- 5) Children supported in a 'permanent' home such as SGOs, care leavers and adopted children at over £11 million annually or 6% of total spend.

Number of children supported

Table 12 also shows a wide range of support being given to children across all different levels of need.

The largest groups of support for children are:

- 1) School related support. This was by far the largest group in councils averaging 74,100 children, or 64% of all reported children being supported annually. This was mainly due to the large school age population receiving universal school related support such as home to school transport and admissions support;
- 2) Universal early years provision, averaging 10,000 children annually across this sample (almost 9% of all reported children supported), mainly for the provision of the free early education entitlement for three and four year olds; and
- 3) SEN support, averaging 8,100 children annually and 7% of all reported children supported – in line with the large number of children identified as having SEND reported nationally.⁴⁰

Figure 2, below, visually presents the average number of children supported in each category across the nine LAs. As national data collections centre on activity data for specific services or programmes – this is one of the first comprehensive attempts to identify all the children receiving support from children's services annually. It shows that many more children are getting some service than national data collections have previously shown. This supports findings from Chapter 2 that children's services were now supporting a substantially larger cohort of children than just those in children's social care.

⁴⁰ Department for Education: Special educational needs in England: January 2018. The national average of pupils with SEN support was 11.7%. National data source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2018>

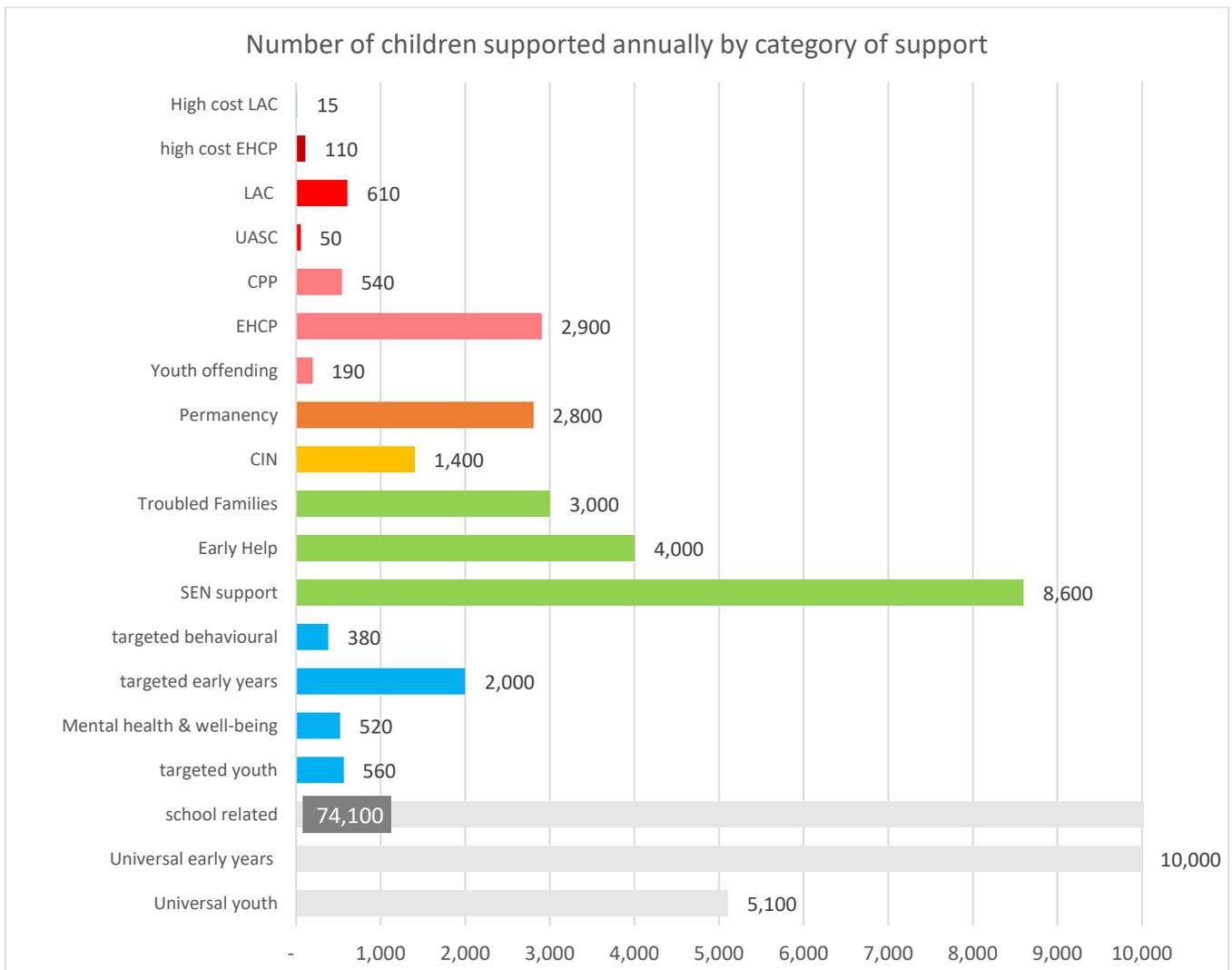


Figure 5 - Average number children supported within each category across the sample of LAs in 2017-18.

As to be expected it shows somewhat of a negative relationship between numbers of children supported and their level of need. There are relatively lower numbers of children supported with their acute and high needs, such as looked after children and young offenders, compared to children supported by pre-statutory such as ‘Early Help’ and universal youth work.

An exception are the low numbers of children supported by targeted support relative to pre-statutory and even some statutory support. This is partly due to the nature of this support which is targeted at small, specific groups of children. But it is also likely to be due to the range of different types of support, services and interventions captured by these categories that council did not have adequate data on – as highlighted in Chapter 3. As well as the fact that local authorities have seen a cut to these types of support as highlighted in Chapter 2 and national data showing 60% cuts in targeted early years and young people’s services.⁴¹

⁴¹ Spending on as Sure Start and young people’s services has been cut by around 60% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2016–17. Institute for Fiscal Studies (2018) Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Public-Spending-on-Children-in-England-CCO-JUNE-2018.pdf>

Overall, Figure 2 shows that pre-statutory services, those below children identified as a 'Child in Need' account for the majority of children accessing some specific form of children's services support.

Profile of spend and the number of children supported

The section above presents data by each *category* of support. This section groups categories into the *levels* of support as set out in Figure 1, Chapter 3. Below Figure 3 shows the annual average number of children supported at each level and the proportion of all children it represents. Figure 4 shows annual average gross expenditure by level of support across the sample of LAs and the proportion of all expenditure this represents. The figures are not entirely comparable as Figure 4 also contains the proportion of total spend on overheads and unapportioned staffing spend, which does not feature in the number of children supported in Figure 3.

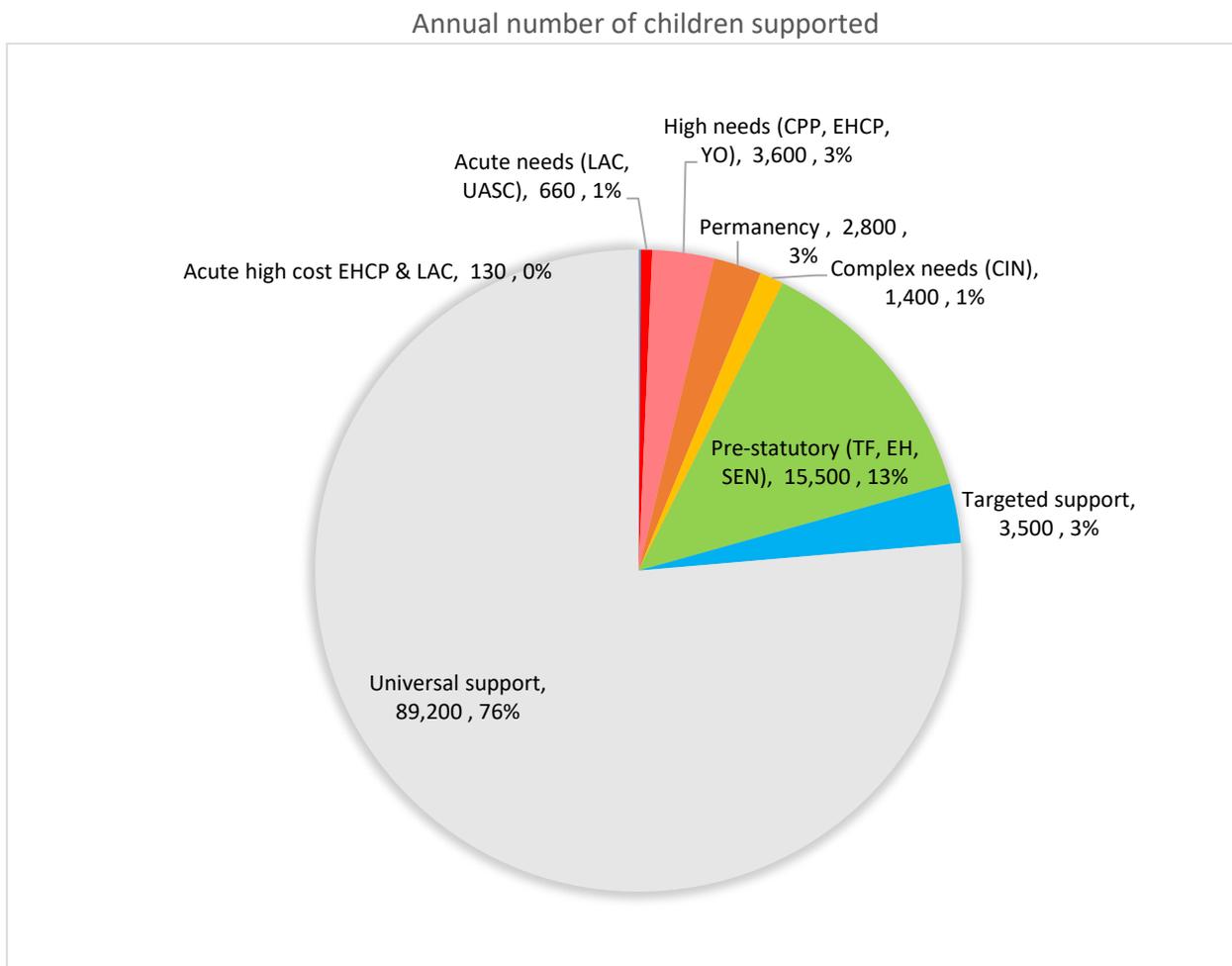


Figure 6 - average annual number and proportion of supported children for each level of support reported by the LA sample in 2017/18

Annual spend on children

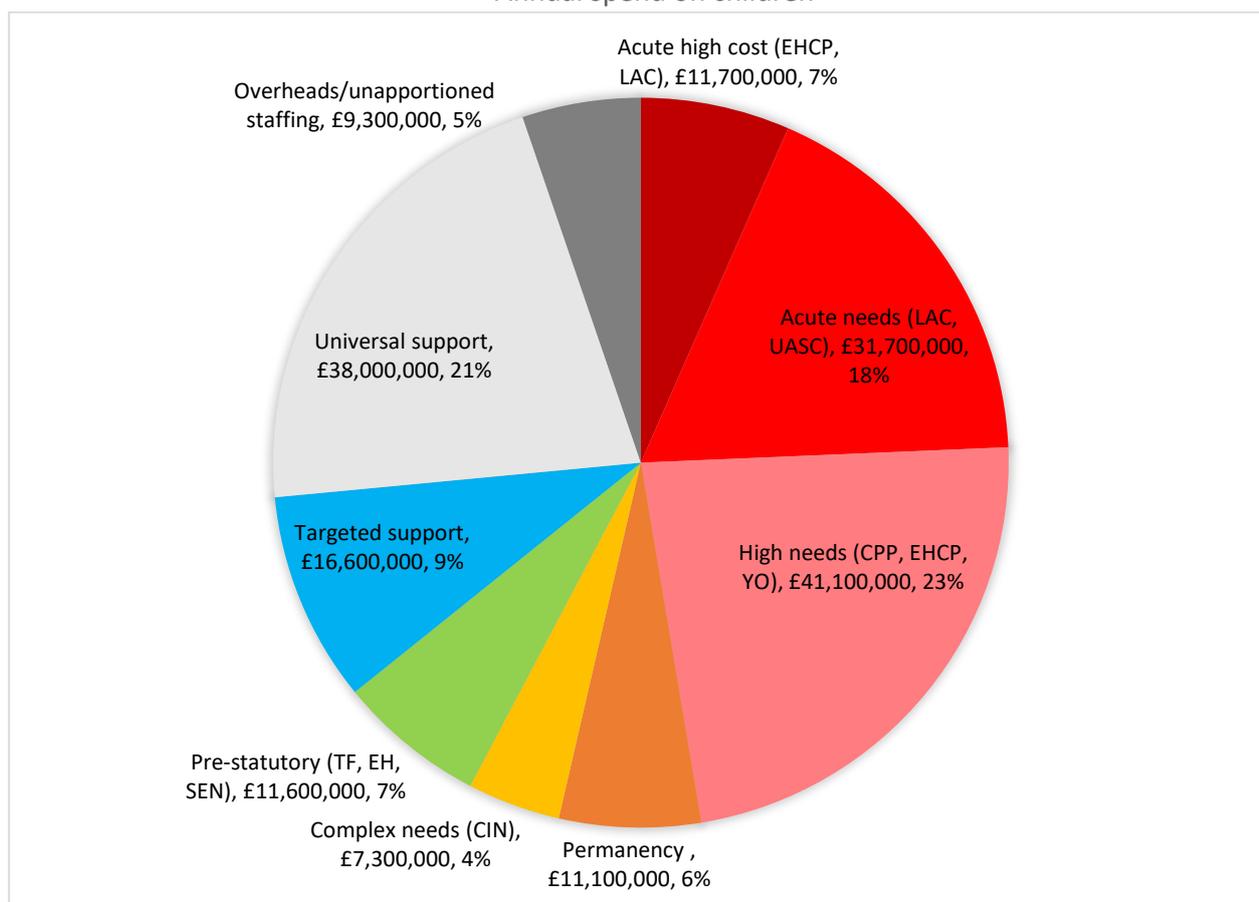


Figure 7 - average annual gross expenditure and proportion of annual gross expenditure for each level of support across the sampled LAs in 2017/18

Looking at Figures 3 and 4 jointly, they show that universal support makes up an average of 76% of all children supported – that’s over 89,000 children per LA annually – but just over a fifth (21%) of spend, equalling £38 million annually.

The largest proportion of spend goes on supporting children with high need, i.e. children with an EHCP, children with a CPP and young offenders. This group receives over a fifth of total gross expenditure (23% or over £41 million) but comprises an average of 3% of children supported, 3,600 children on average per LA annually. The large proportion of total spend is mainly comprised on spend on children with an EHCP, as shown in Table 12.

Spend on children with acute needs (looked after children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) makes up just under a fifth (18%) of average annual spend – almost £32 million a year - for a group comprising less than 1% of all children supported annually by children’s services. This was an average of 660 children per LA.

The contrast between spend and support is even more stark when looking at children with highly acute needs⁴². This group of children make up an average of 7% of total gross expenditure but just 0.1% of the

⁴² Which includes looked after children in high cost residential placements and children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision

total number of children supported annually. This represents an average spend of almost £12 million and average of 130 children annually.

All statutory support (including acute, high and complex needs as well as permanency) makes up an average of 7% of all children supported by children's services, around 8,600 children annually. Yet this group of children make up the majority (58%) of spend at an average of over £100 million a year per LA.

In contrast, all non-statutory support (adding together pre-statutory, targeted and universal support) makes up the vast majority (93%) of all children supported by children's services – an average of just over 108,000 annually – but just 37% of spend, over £66 million annually.

Spend per child

Figure 5 illustrates the average levels of spend per child on all categories of support for the nine LAs. It shows a strong positive relationship between need and spend with high spend per child for children supported with highly acute needs relative to all other categories of support.

Spend per child was found to be extremely high for looked after children in high cost residential placements at an average of £260,000 per year. Although not as high, per child spend on children with an EHCP at £87,000 annually was also comparatively high. This is to be expected. All LAs reported that the most acute financial pressure on children's services budget was from specialist, residential placements for children in care with significant additional needs and from their high needs budget to support children with an EHCP through specialist provision. Therefore a spend threshold was assigned to these categories. However, it was surprising to find how high the average annual spend was on these children and how many children on average reached this threshold: 15 children in care and 110 children with an EHCP per LA.

It was also surprising to find that per child spend on looked after children (even when excluding those children who fell into the high cost category) was still substantial at an average of £53,000 per year, with an average of 610 children in care supported annually.

Spend per child on statutory services below these acute levels of need ranged from £7,000 per child for children supported with their 'permanency' and £8,300 per child for children identified as a 'Child in Need' to £9,300 for a child with a CPP and £14,000 per child for a child with an EHCP.

Visits to LAs identified some really positive work to support children in a 'permanent' home that is not with their birth parent (including Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), care leaver and adopted children).

This report found that while this presented only 2% of children supported it averaged £7,000 per child, in contrast to an average of £53,000 for looked after children⁴³ and even £9,300 spend per child supported with a Child Protection Plan and £8,300 per child for those identified as a 'Child in Need'.

In contrast, spend per child on pre-statutory early prevention support was much lower. Spend per child supported by an LAs 'Early Help' services was £3,900 per child. Spend per child in the Troubled Families Programme was £1,600 per child and average spend on children identified as having SEN support was £700 per child.

⁴³ Excluding looked after children in high cost residential placements and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

The high annual per child spend of £24,000 for targeted behavioural and mental health and wellbeing support can be seen in Figure 5. Table 1 shows that these categories have a low number of children that receive these types of support. This is because these types of support are very specific to a small group. For example, behavioural support includes children in Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision as well as children Not in Employment, Education or Training. Targeted mental health and well-being support was mainly for specialised early mental health services. It would therefore appear that these categories of support have a comparatively high per child spend. It should also be noted (as shown in Table 2) that some councils struggled to capture the number of children supported in all the different groups within these categories. This could have impacted on the calculated per child spend figures.

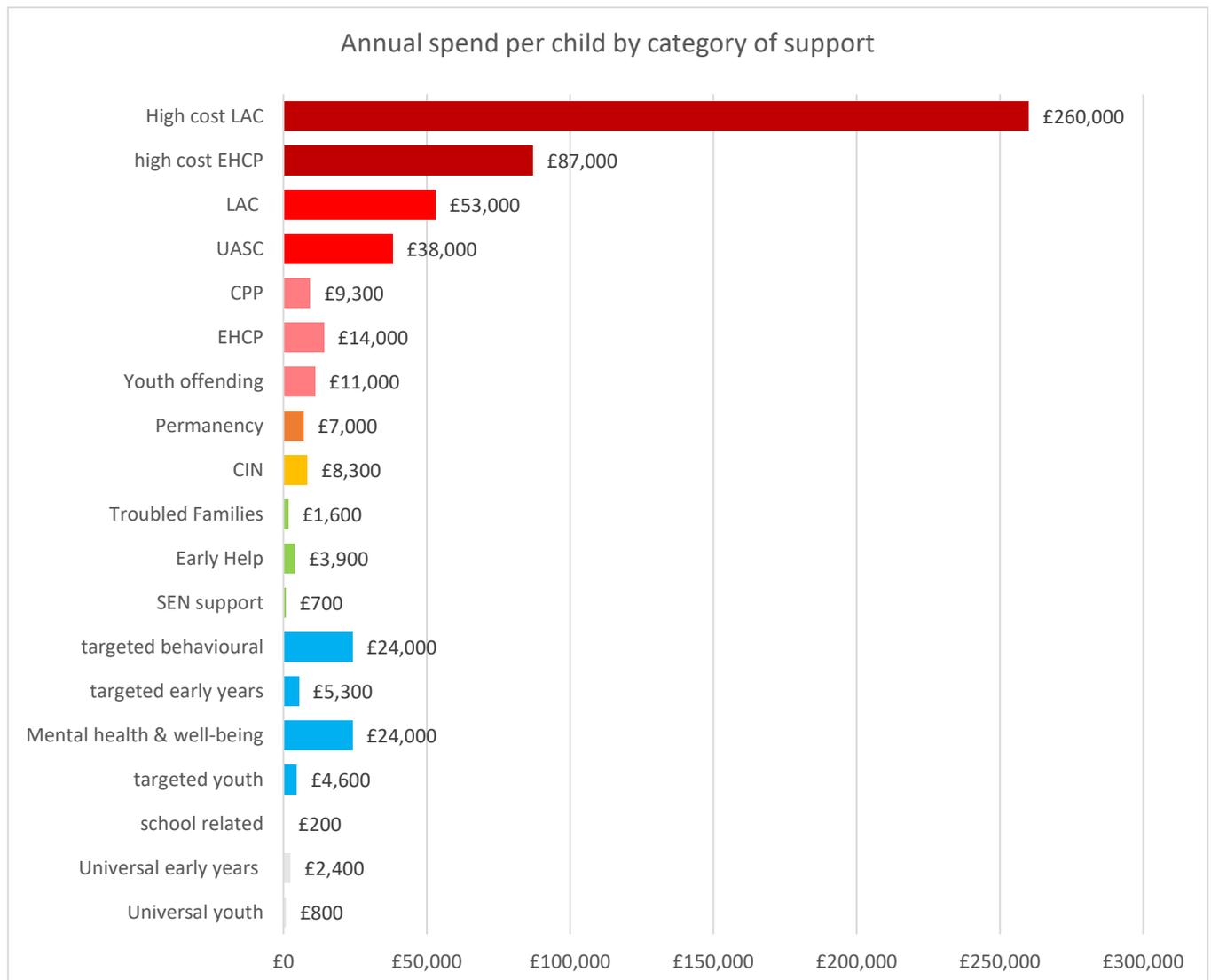


Figure 8 - Calculated average annual 2017/18 gross expenditure per child across the sample of LAs for each category of children supported. Expenditure per child is rounded to the nearest number depending on amount (i.e. £0, £00, £000)

Spend and children supported within the framework

Figure 6 presents data according to the framework set out in Figure 1 in Chapter 3. It shows for 2017/18 financial year the average spend per child for each group of children supported, the average proportion

that each group makes up of total spend and the average proportion that each group makes up of the total number of children supported.

Annual spend per child was found to be an average of £192,000 for children supported with highly acute needs (i.e. looked after children in high cost residential placements and children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision). This was 7% of total spend and 0.1% of children supported annually.

Acute needs, children in care and unaccompanied asylum seeking children made up an average of 1% of children supported but 18% of total spend which equated to £52,000 per child annually.

Children with high needs⁴⁴, children supported with their ‘permanency’ and children with complex needs identified as a ‘Child in Need’ had similar per child spend at £12,000, £7,000 and £8,300 and similar proportions of total children supported – 3%, 2% and 1% respectively – their proportion of total spend was substantially different. Children supported with their high needs made up 23% of total spend whereas children supported with their permanency and ‘Children in Need’ made up 6% and 4% of total spend respectively.

The contrast in per child spend between targeted services at £7,000 per child and pre-statutory support (made up of Early Help, Troubled Families and SEN support) at £900 per child annually and £490 per child for universal support is notable.

Average annual spend per child, proportion of total spend and proportion of children supported

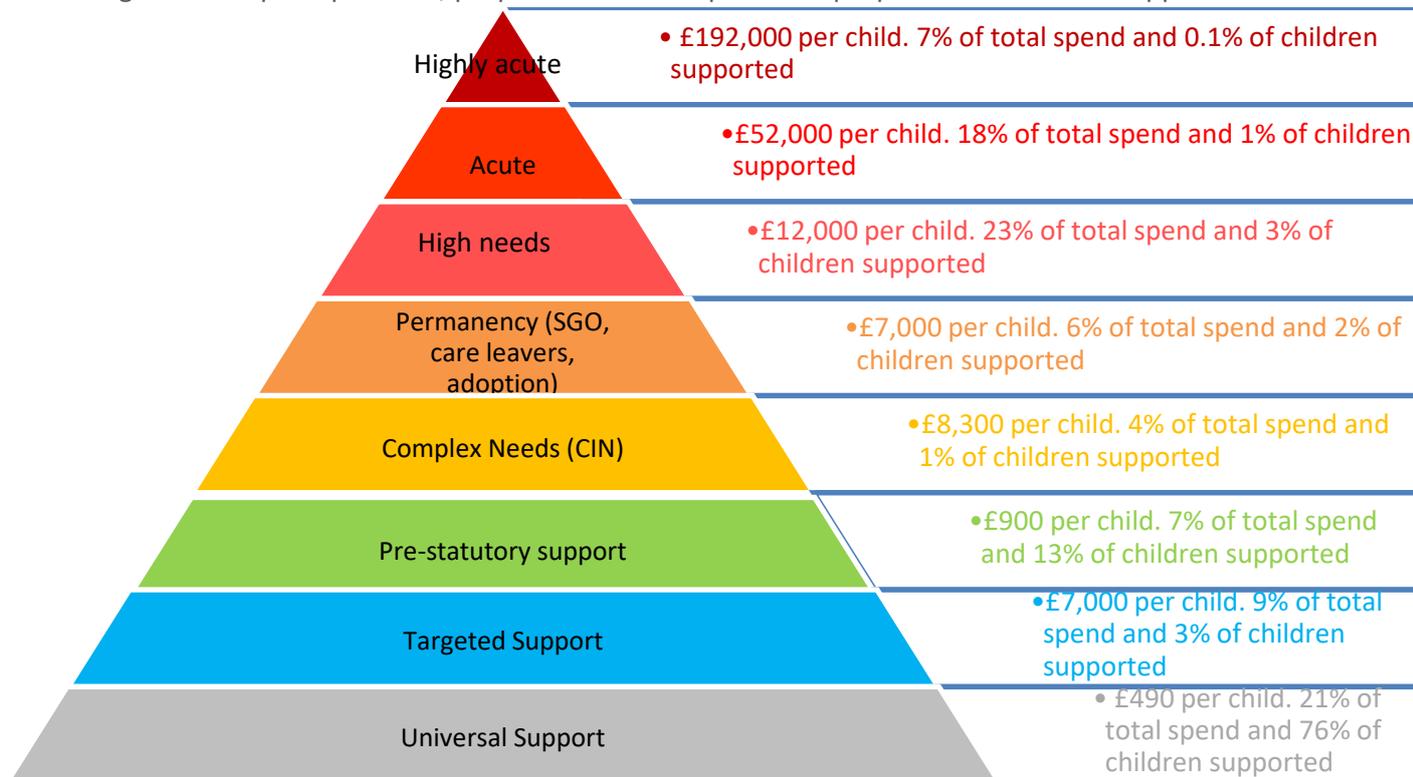


Figure 9 – Average annual gross expenditure per child, average annual proportion of total gross expenditure (note this includes 5% on overheads and un-apportioned staffing not included in the figure) and average annual proportion of children supported. Averages are from across the LAs in the sample for 2017/18.

⁴⁴ Children with an EHCP or a CPP and young offenders supported by statutory services.

Profile of spend and numbers of children by programme categories

Figure 7 sets out the numbers of children being supported, Figure 8 the profile of spend and Figure 9 per child spend by *programme categories*, rather than by the mapping framework shown in Figure 1 and 6 which look at levels of support. While the framework looks at children on the basis of levels of support for their needs, it is recognised that agencies often use 'programme' categories which assign children into groups based on the spend they receive from specific services and programmes.

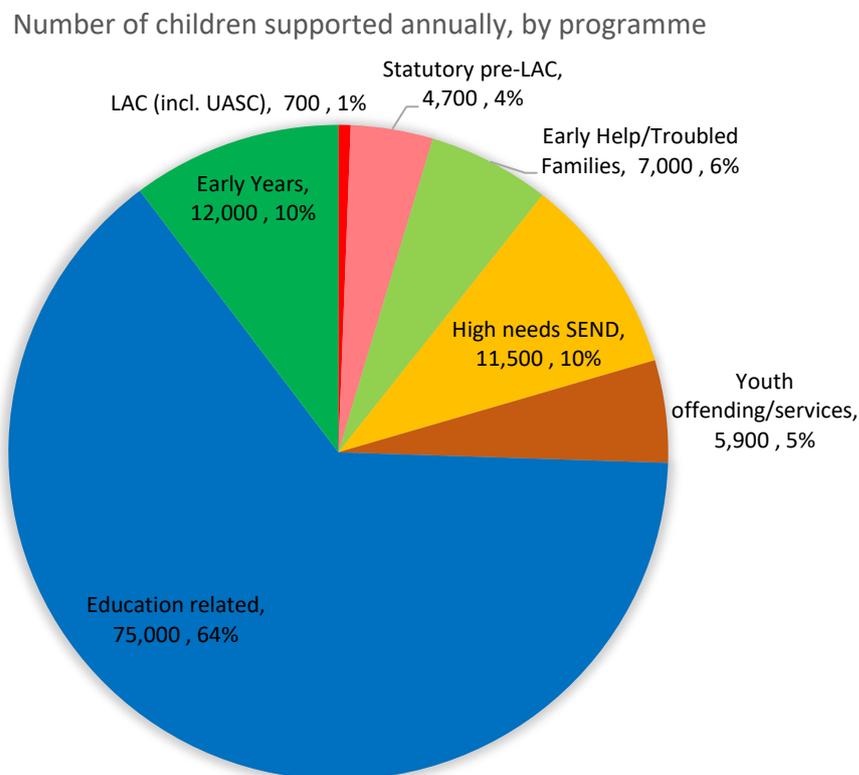


Figure 10 - Average number and proportion of supported children reported by the LAs by programme categories in the sample in 2017/18

Spend on children supported annually by programme

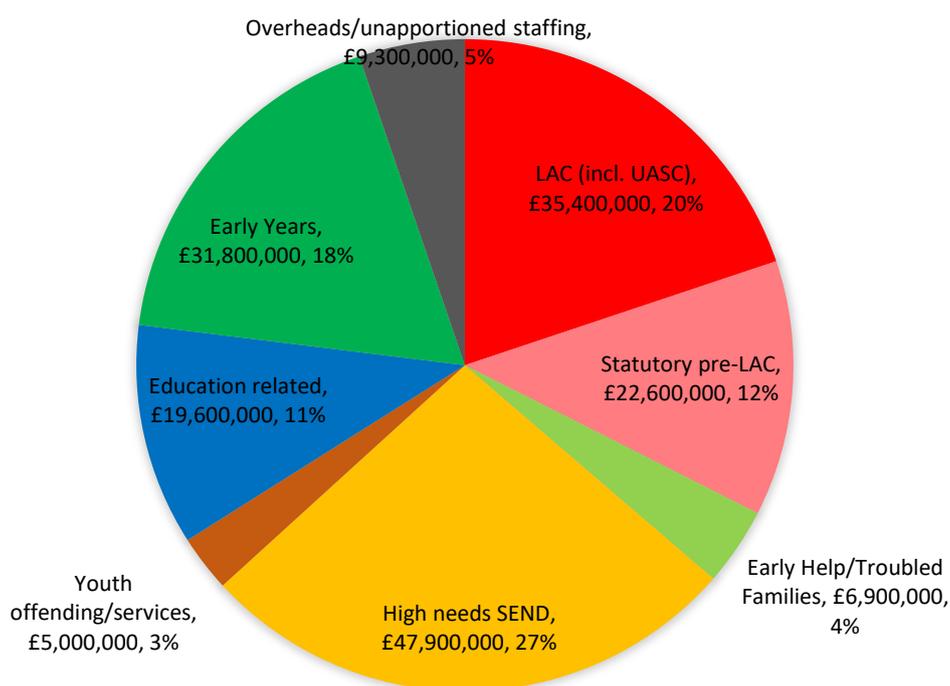


Figure 11 - average gross expenditure and proportion of annual gross expenditure by programme categories across the sampled LAs in 2017/18

It can be seen from Figure 7 that looked after children made up 1% of all children supported annually (averaging 700 per LA), but made up a fifth (20%) of total annual spend as shown in Figure 8, at an average of £57,000 per child per year. Children in social care but not looked after⁴⁵ made up 4% of all children supported and a further 12% of total spend – equating to £5,000 per child annually.

Taken together, average spend on these statutory services⁴⁶ was around £58 million annually (22% of total spend) but just 5% of children supported – averaging 5,400 children annually.

These figures should not be wholly surprising given the current evidence on the high cost of these statutory services.⁴⁷ However, only a slightly larger average number of children (6% of children – 7,000 annually) were supported by LA’s Early Help services and the Troubled Families Programme, yet spend was just 4% of total spend under £7 million annually – equalling £3,200 per child.

Figure 7 shows that a tenth of all children supported (averaging around 11,500 annually) were for children with SEND including those with an EHCP and those identified as needing SEN support. Yet in

⁴⁵ Including children with a CPP, supported in their ‘permanency’ (such as SGOs, care leavers and adopted children) as well as children identified as a ‘Child in Need’,

⁴⁶ This included children in care, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children with a CPP, supported in their ‘permanency’ (such as SGOs, care leavers and adopted children) as well as children identified as a ‘Child in Need’.

⁴⁷ National Audit Office (2019). Pressures on children’s social care. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/pressures-on-childrens-social-care/>; House of Commons: Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (2019). Funding of local authorities’ children’s services. Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1638/1638.pdf>;

Figure 8 children with SEND account for over a quarter of spend (27%) which was nearly £50 million annually, shown in Figure 9 to be £5,000 annually per child.

The contrast between early years and youth services is noteworthy. As a proportion of all children, early years supports one in ten (an average of 12,000 children annually) and youth services one in twenty (an average of 5,900 annually). However, early years spend is averaged around £32 million (18% of total spend) and youth services is only £5 million (3% of total spend). The difference is mainly attributable to the government funded provision for pre-school children with no such provision for older children, in addition to statutory requirements such as higher staff to child ratios which could impact on costs.

Education related services⁴⁸ make up almost two-thirds (64%) of all children supported by children’s services but around a tenth of spend (11%) at a cost of £400 per child per year.

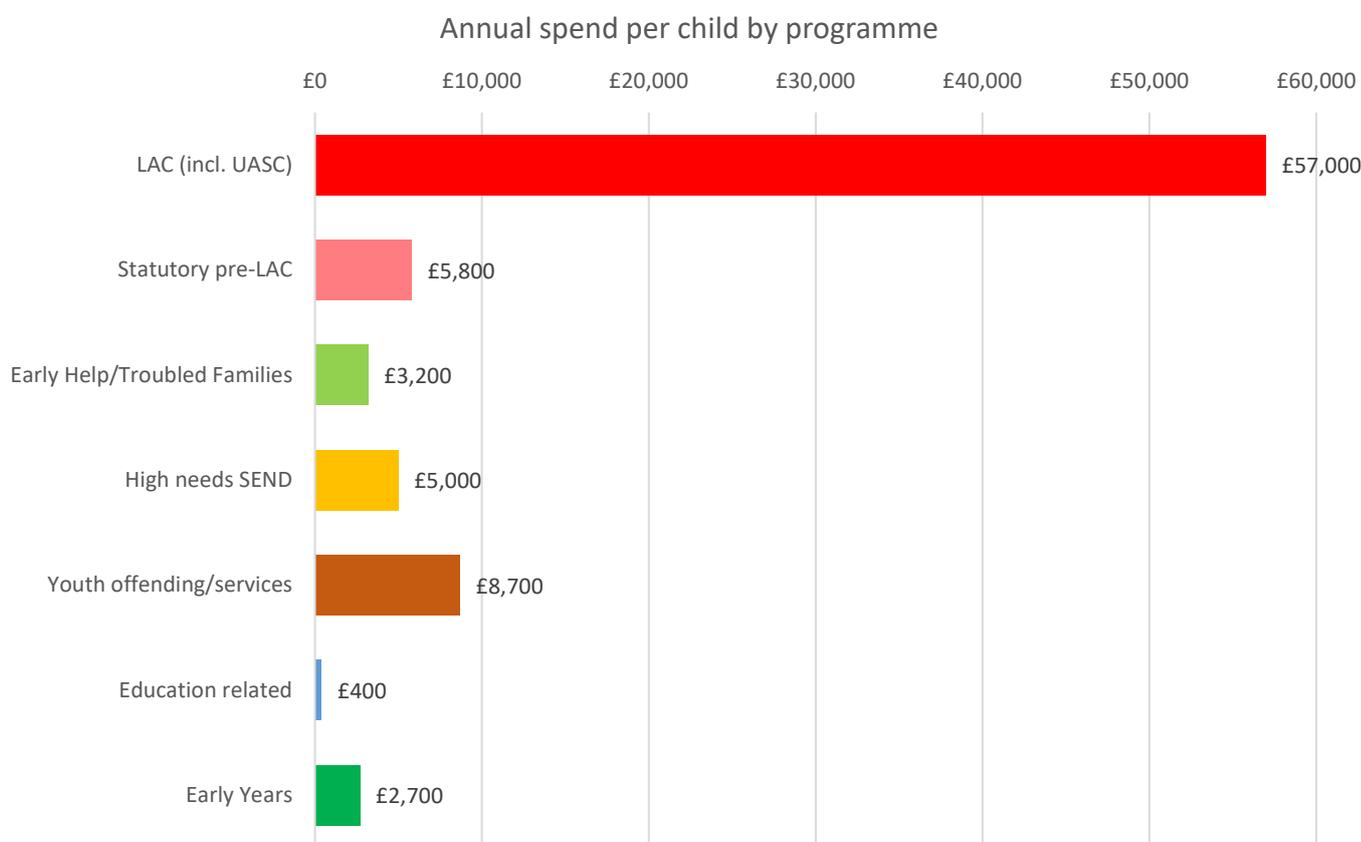


Figure 12 - average gross expenditure per child by programme categories across the sampled LAs in 2017/18.

⁴⁸ This included universal school related support (such as school improvement, admissions, music provision and home to school transport), behavioural support (such as Pupil Referral Units) and mental health and wellbeing services.

Findings on specific categories of support

This chapter reports findings on two areas of particular concern that were raised by local authorities, outlined in Chapter 2: i) children's social care and preventative, pre-statutory support and ii) support to children with SEND from the high needs budget.

Children's social care and preventative, pre-statutory support

A major concern raised in visits to councils was that they believed they would have to make further substantial cuts to their children's services budgets, particularly for non-statutory services, in the next two to three years.

Figures 10 and 11 report data on numbers of children supported and spend in children's social care and in pre-statutory support in the form of children's services' 'Early Help' support and the Troubled Families Programme (TF). These latter two categories are presented together as councils in the sample stated they had integrated the Troubled Families Programme into their 'Early Help' offer. Yet what was clear from visits to local authorities was that what the offer included was hugely diverse between local areas. Ranging from parenting classes to long-term key worker support for families with chronic issues as domestic violence, substance abuse.

Local authorities felt that this level of support for children is critical not just in averting escalation into statutory services and more expensive support (which they felt had poorer outcomes for children) but also in supporting children's general well-being and development.

Figure 10 shows similar proportions of children were being supported in statutory social care and in pre-statutory support. Figure 11 shows that spend on pre-statutory support was under £7 million (4% of total annual spend) but spend on children's statutory social care was 15%, close to £60 million if all spend on children's social care was added together.

Children supported by children's social care and pre-statutory support

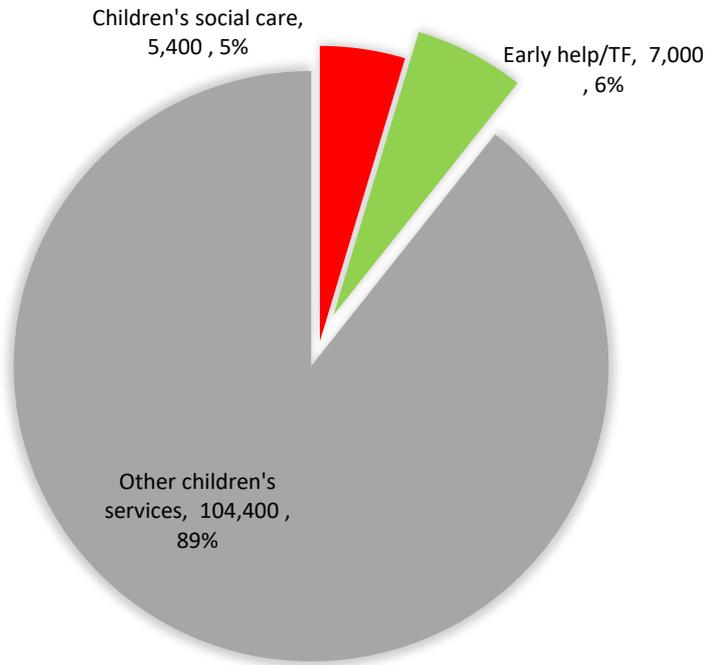


Figure 13 - average number and proportion of children receiving children's care support in sampled LAs in 2017/18

Spend on children's social care and preventative support within total spend

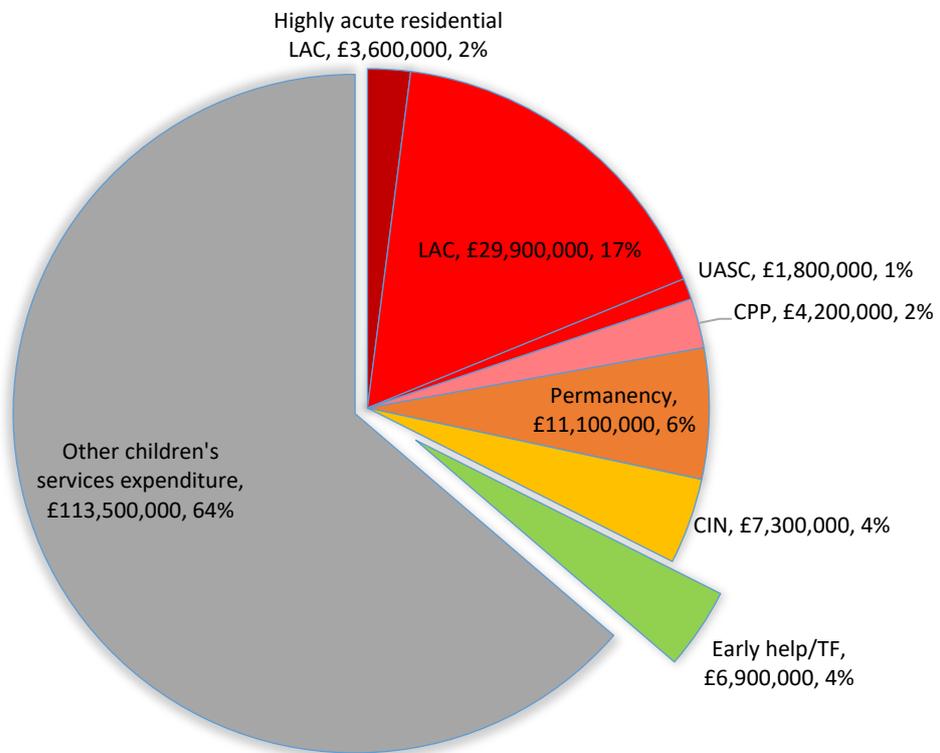


Figure 14 - average proportion and amount of total gross expenditure for children receiving children's social care in sampled LAs in 2017/18

Table 13 shows the breakdown for each local authority in the sample spend per child on children's social care by category of support as well as for a combined category of pre-statutory Early help and Troubled Families. Overall, it shows quite a substantial amount of variation across councils within each category as well as variation across all categories within each local authority.

Table 13 - Spend per child on children's social care and preventative, pre-statutory support across the sample

	Average	LA A	LA B	LA C	LA D	LA E	LA F	LA G	LA H	LA I
High cost LAC	£257,500	£278,200	£236,700	£281,300	£336,400	£104,100	£200,000	£251,300	£355,800	£273,900
LAC	£52,800	£38,800	£44,000	£55,600	£69,600	£21,000	£62,700	£62,500	£74,900	£45,800
UASC	£38,000	-	£66,100	£43,000	£48,000	£21,400	£19,900	£44,100	-	£23,700
CPP	£9,300	£4,400	£11,600	£14,500	£10,900	£2,700	£18,700	£8,800	£9,100	£3,400
Permanency	£7,300	£11,100	£2,600	£5,200	£11,500	£1,400	£9,500	£12,700	£1,700	£9,700
CIN	£8,300	£4,900	£16,700	£16,700	£11,600	£6,900	£4,000	£2,900	-	£2,400
Early Help/TF	£3,200	£2,000	£600	£4,400	£1,200	£1,500	£500	£15,100	£2,100	£1,300

Annual gross expenditure per child in 2017/18 for children's social care preventative, pre-statutory support for all LAs in the sample as well as the average.

Looked after children in high cost residential placements

As stated previously, all LAs reported that the most acute financial pressure on children's services budget was coming from specialist, residential placements for looked After Children (LAC) with significant additional needs.⁴⁹

Table 13 shows that the average per child spend masks large variation ranging from over £350,000 to just over £100,000 per year. When looking at the number of looked after children in high cost residential placements there is not a clear pattern between the number of children supported and the cost per child. Instead, findings from local authority visits suggests this is partly due to the very small number of children with varying types and severity of highly

⁴⁹ As stated in Chapter 3, this category was defined and separated out from the looked after child category. The average number of children within this category was 15, ranging from under 10 to almost 30 within the sample of LAs. In comparison, there was an average of 610 looked after children supported across the sample of LAs who did not meet the high cost threshold which ranged within the sample between just under 140 to over 1,000 children.

acute needs. This resulted in councils being unable to achieve economies of scale, combined with a stated shortage of children in care residential placements, particularly in certain regions (See Chapter 2 for more details).

Spend per child spend on supporting looked after children had a smaller but still significant variation (between £21,000 and just under £70,000 per child annually). Again, there appears to be little relationship between the numbers of children in care supported and the per child spend.

To look at the relationship between these categories Figure 9 shows annual average spend per child for looked after children in high cost residential placements (in dark red) and looked after children (in red) for each local authority in the sample.

It shows a pattern in many councils where costs are relatively for both categories, although there are some outliers.

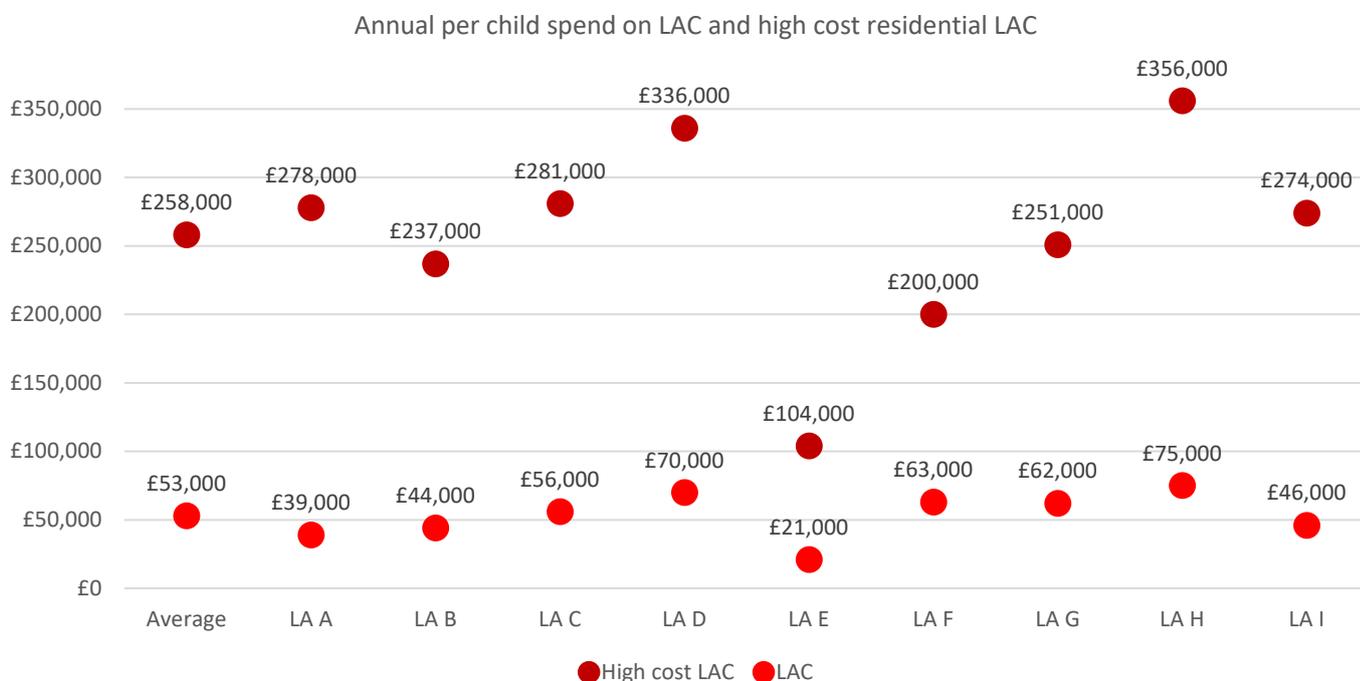


Figure 15 - Annual gross expenditure per child in 2017/18 for LAC and high cost residential LAC for all LAs in the sample including the average

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Table 13 shows that the average annual spend per child on unaccompanied asylum seeking children is on average £15,000 lower than the average annual spend on looked after children. This could be due to the more complex needs of children in care as well as the level of funding that LAs receive to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Some councils believed that the funding to support these children, often with very complex needs, was inadequate. But because data is not available on the complexity of needs of children in care, it was not possible to verify these statements.

Yet the average difference did mask a large amount of variation within the sample. In some councils spend per child on UASC is substantially higher. Several councils believed this was due to the complex

needs of some unaccompanied asylum seeking children such as SEND needs. This again indicates how the specific needs of children drive spending variation across authorities.

Children supported by other social care.

The differences were relatively small between average per child spend between other social care categories such as children supported with a Child Protection Plan (CPP) at £9,300 per child annually, children supported in their 'permanency' at £7,300 per child annually, and children identified as a 'Child in Need' at £8,300. However, this masked substantial variations within these categories across councils. This is partly explained by the wide variation in the number of children in these categories as low numbers of children was in some categories associated with higher spend per child. Nevertheless, there were a number of outliers in this suggesting that other factors are at play. For children supported in their permanency and children identified as a 'Child in Need', the lack of good data on the number of children within these categories could be a factor. Local authorities also indicated that high spend for children supported in their permanency may be due to the high cost of securing an adoption as well as leaving care placements. Variation in the spend per child could also be due to the discretion that LAs had in apportioning social worker spend between these categories (as set out in Chapter 3).

Looked after children and children supported by social care and pre-statutory services

Figure 12 groups categories shown in Table 13 into three broad levels: i) looked after children; ii) children in social care who are not looked after; and, iii) pre-statutory early help and the Troubled Families Programme.

It shows that there is a broad pattern with per child spend on looked after children substantially higher than children in social care who are not looked after which is itself marginally higher than per child spend on pre-statutory support. However, there is substantial variation between looked after children per child spend and there does not appear to be a relationship between the three groups of support – i.e. high spend in one (for example looked after children) does not translate to high, or even low cost in another.

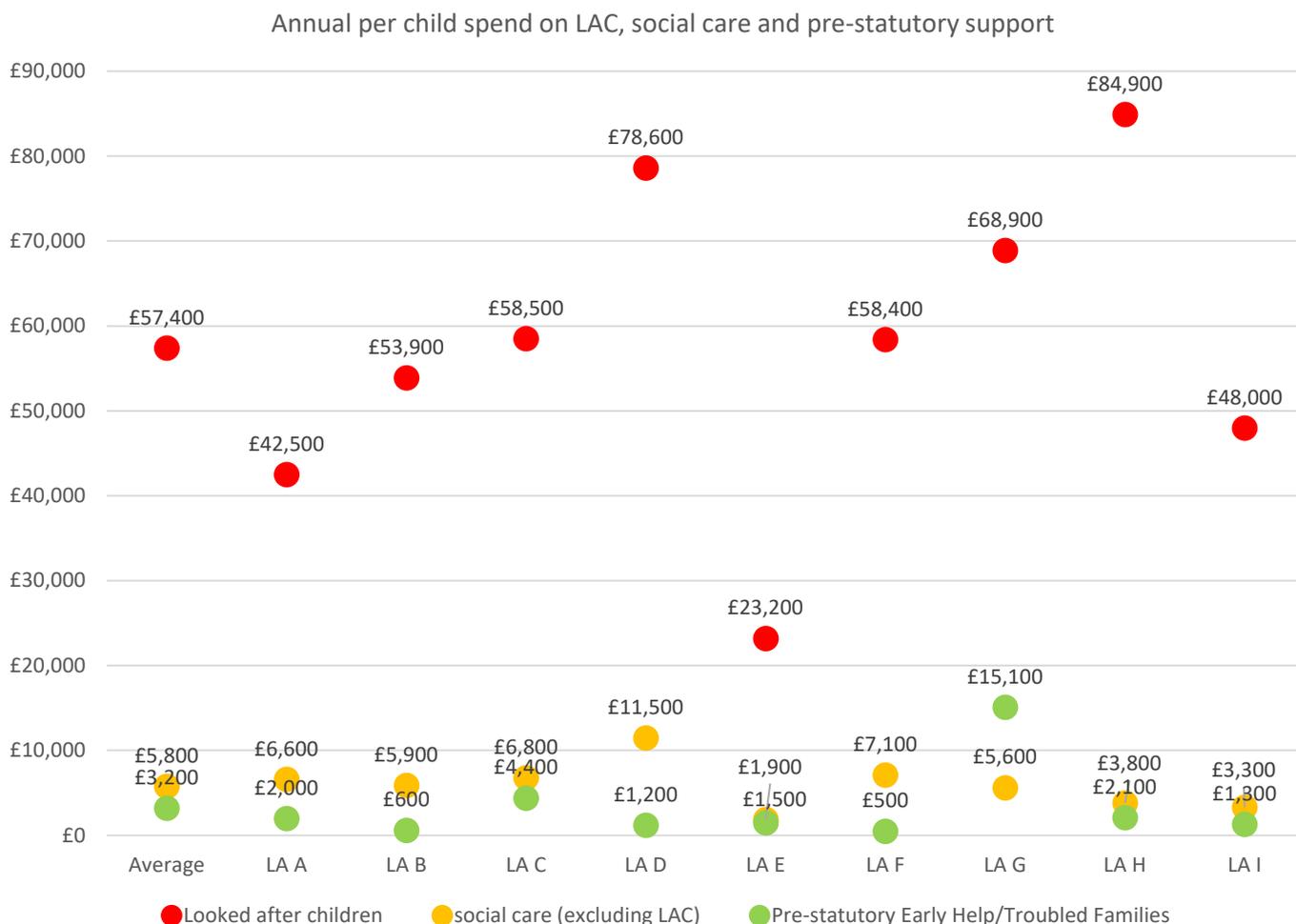


Figure 16 - Annual gross expenditure per child in 2017/18 for looked after children, children in social care who are not looked after and pre-statutory early help and Troubled Families Programme all LAs in the sample including the average

Children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND)

A key issue highlighted in the Children’s Commissioner’s *Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020* IFS report and in the visits to local authorities was the rising financial pressures on the high needs budget to support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This was seen as a result of the rise in pupil numbers at more expensive specialist provision as well as the cost to councils of children with SEND in mainstream schools due to what was widely perceived as a general underfunding of educational support. Other causes referred to by local authorities were the cost of the statutory extension of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) to 25 years as well as the overall squeeze on local authority budgets limiting their flexibility to respond to unexpectedly high levels of need. Councils identified the lack of funding for home-school transport for SEND children as an additional problem.

Figure 14 shows that just under three quarters of children supported with their SEND needs were receiving SEN support (averaged at 8,600 annually). Figure 15 shows that this group received a tenth of SEND spend, at an average of under £5 million annually). On the other hand, the 1% of SEND children who were supported by EHCP specialist provision (an average of 110 children annually) received support accounting for 17% of the cost of supporting SEND, at an average of £8 million annually.

Number of SEND children supported

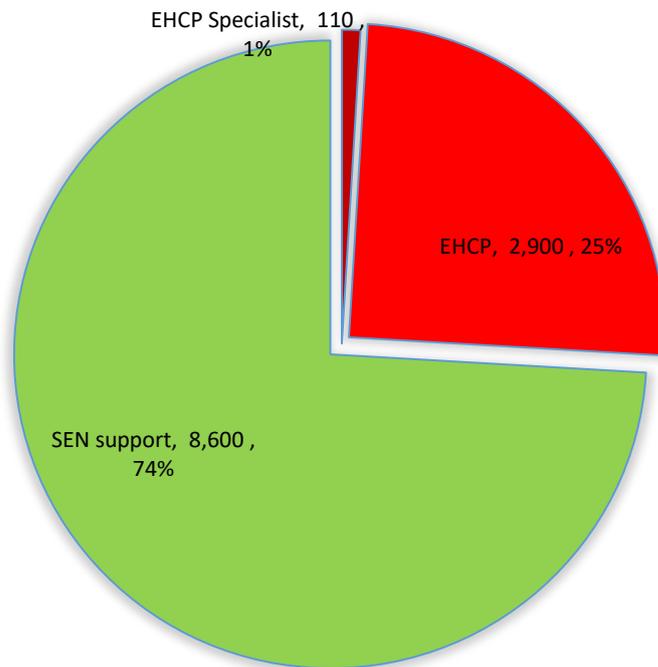


Figure 17 – average amount and proportion of spend for children receiving support for SEND in sampled LAs in 2017/18

Spend on children with SEND

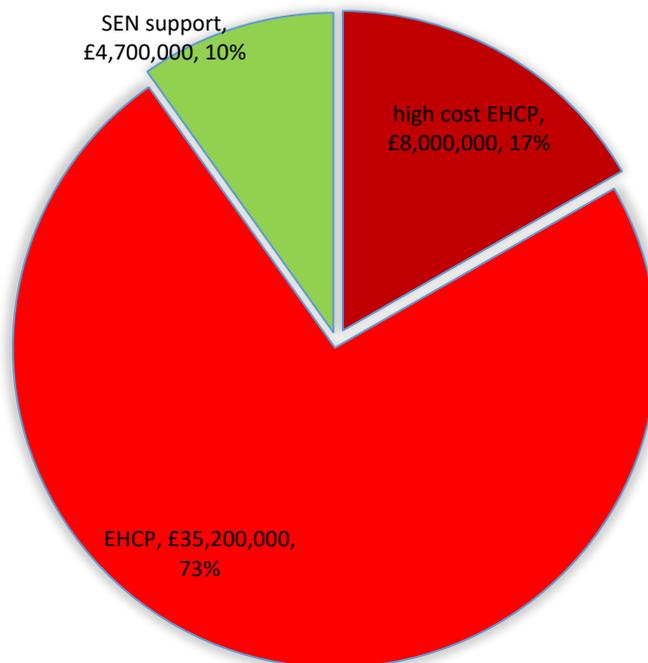


Figure 18 - average number and proportion of all children receiving support for SEND in sampled LAs in 2017/18

Table 14 displays the breakdown in each LA of spend per child supported by SEND. It shows substantial variation between LAs in each category of support. Spend on children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision ranged from £36,900 per child annually to over £207,700 per child. Spend on children with an EHCP ranged from £20,200 to £8,300 per child annually and SEN support ranged from £300 to £1,700 per child annually.

	Average	LA A	LA B	LA C	LA D	LA E	LA F	LA G	LA H	LA I
High cost EHCP	£86,700	£47,800	£95,300	£90,000	£36,900	£82,600	£61,500	£71,500	-	£207,700
EHCP	£13,900	£14,700	£15,600	£9,200	£18,900	£9,800	£13,500	£20,200	£14,600	£8,300
SEN support	£700	£800	£400	£400	£700	£600	£1,700	£600	£300	£700

Table 14 - Spend per child supported with SEND across the sample

While there is a similar gradient of spend per child from high cost EHCP to EHCP to SEN support, the ratio between their levels of spend was substantially different across the LAs.

Figure 16 shows the ratio for each local authority of spend per child for children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision relative to children with an EHCP (yellow dots). It also displays the ratio of spend per child for children with an EHCP relative to children with SEN support (purple dots). On average, spend per child with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision was 6 times higher than spend per child with an EHCP per child spend. Yet this ranged from two times to 25 times higher. Spend per child with an EHCP relative to spend per child with SEN support was on average 20 times higher. Yet across the sample of local authorities, this ranged from 8 times higher to 49 times higher.

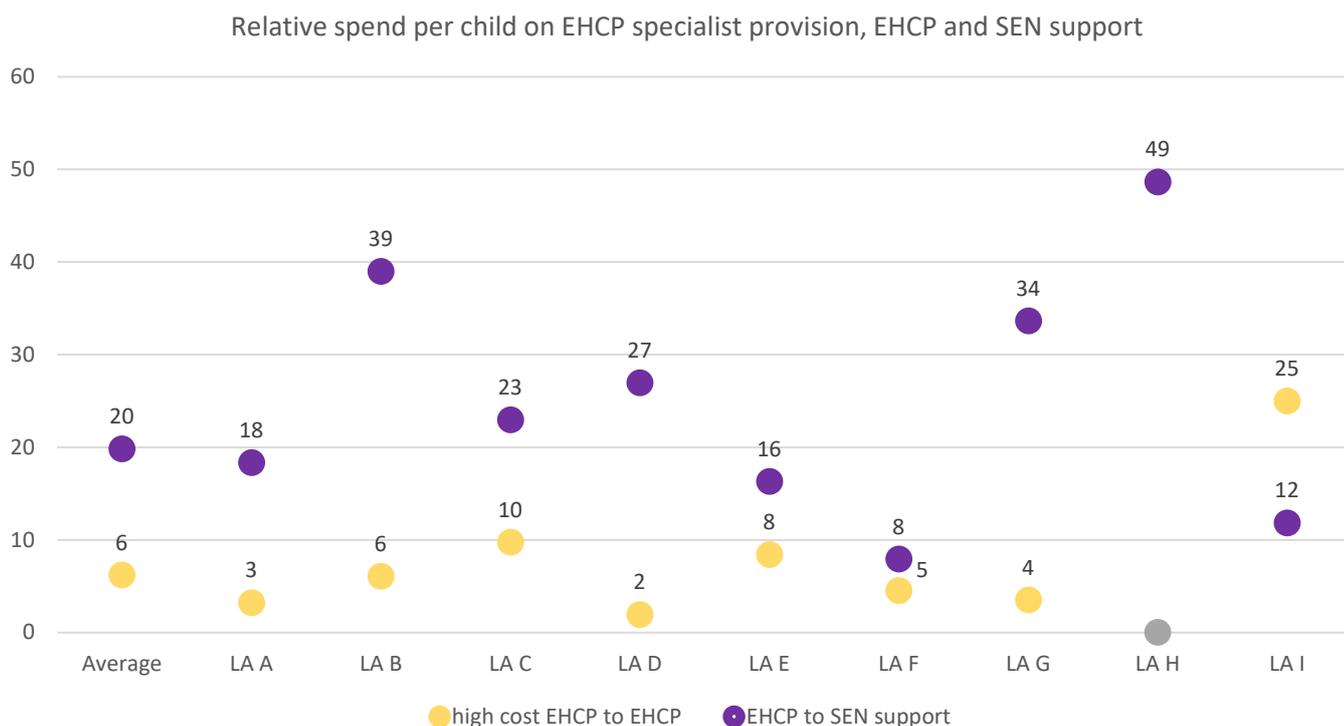


Figure 19 – relative annual gross expenditure per child in 2017/18 for high cost EHCP relative to EHCP and EHCP relative to SEN support all LAs in the sample. LA H in grey indicates no available data on high children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision

Finally, it should be noted that local authorities collected data on the numbers of looked after children in high cost residential placements and children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision separately. However, LA I was able to identify the cross over between these two highly acute needs groups. This is set out in Table 15 and shows that there is a degree of cross over between these categories. This firstly helps explain the high per child spend on children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision in LA I (Table 14) and shows that further work needs to be undertaken to understand the needs of these two groups together as many of the looked after children in high cost residential placements are children who also have an EHCP.

	Gross expenditure	Number of children	Spend per child
High cost LAC (with an EHCP)	£2,400,000	9	£270,000
High cost LAC (without an EHCP)	£3,300,000	13	£260,000
High cost EHCP (non- LAC)	£530,000	6	£95,000
High cost LAC and EHCP	£3,300,000	27	£230,000

Table 15 – The cross over between children in looked after children in high cost residential placements and children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision in one local authority supported in 2017/18.

Gross expenditure, number of children and spend per child have all be rounded.

Conclusions

This report provides first estimates of how much is spent across a sample of nine local authority children's services in England for children with specific needs, vulnerabilities and risks.

There is no robust national data on the number of children with different levels of need supported by children's services, nor with a link made to the associated spending. Therefore, this report provides new and important insight into which groups of children receive support and how much is spent on these types of support.

The report does not provide a full, nationally representative picture of demand or spend on children in England. It only covers children's services, and not other key agencies such as health, welfare, housing and criminal justice. Estimates use cross-sectional data from 2017/18 and therefore do not show trends over time. Some inconsistencies and a degree of double counting in the findings will result from the diversity in accounting methods used by councils, the lack of independent data validation and the multiple data sources on the number of children supported.

These caveats are important. However, it is also important that this work has been able to demonstrate that it is possible to collect data on the question of what is spent on children in terms of what types of children get support for different types of need. Data was obtained from a good spread of councils nationally, broadly representative both in terms of high needs population and their geographic and demographic mix. These councils have provided informative and comparable estimates on the number of children supported and the spend on these children.

This chapter draws out a set of substantive conclusions from the findings of the data analysis and visits to local authorities to consider how the work should be taken forward to improve data in the interests of children. Finally, it draws on these findings to set out a number of policy conclusions considering the implications for policy and measurement.

Key findings

- 1. Non-statutory services account for over a third of spend, but make up nine in ten children supported by children's services. Many more children are getting some service than measured in current national statistics meaning we do not have a complete picture of how many children are getting different types of help for their needs.**

The report estimated that all non-statutory support (adding together pre-statutory, targeted and universal support) makes up the vast majority (93%) of all children supported by children's services – an average of just over 108,000 annually per local authority. Yet this support makes up 37% of spend, calculated at over £66 million per council annually. In contrast, all statutory support (including acute, high and complex needs as well as permanency) supports an average of 7%, around 8,600 children annually (Figures 3 and 4).

The report has shown that local authority children's services spend is spread across a range of different types of support for children and that there is a wide range of support being given to children across all levels of need. This demonstrates that many more children are getting some service than national data collections have previously shown. This is supported by findings from visits to councils who stated they were supporting a substantially larger cohort of children than just those in children's social care.

Comprehensive data is collected on the number of children supported by statutory social care and

children with SEND as well as early years and school related support, linked to Department for Education funding allocations. However, there is no systematic national data on children in receipt of non-statutory support (particularly pre-statutory support such as council's 'Early Help' offers and targeted mental health and wellbeing support as well as youth work).

As a result,

- c) There is no national data on the entire number of children supported by children's services. With no data on the number of children supported by various levels of spend; and
- d) There are large cohorts of children who are accessing support that is not currently recognised in national data collections, for which little is known about the number of children benefiting from support, spend on these or any data on the effectiveness or impact for children.

2. A few cost pressures are placing a disproportionate financial strain on local authorities.

The majority (58%) of spend – an average of over £100 million a year per LA – goes to children supported by statutory support. This made up an average of 7% of all children supported by children's services, around 8,600 children annually per LA (Figures 3 and 4). This is neither surprising nor problematic. Both the High Needs and Children's social care budget are dedicated to children with additional needs or vulnerability.

Visits to LAs identified positive work to support children in a 'permanent' home that is not with their birth parent (including Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), care leaver and adopted children). This averaged £7,000 per year per child – in contrast to an average of £53,000 for looked after children⁵⁰ and even £9,300 spend per child supported with a Child Protection Plan and £8,300 per child for those identified as a 'Child in Need' (Table 12). These children supported in their permanency do not appear in the looked after children statistics, but they and their families are still receiving significant amount of support from the local authority, and this should be recognised in national data collections.

However, LAs highlighted that it was the concentration on a very few children which was causing acute financial strain. Children with highly acute needs⁵¹ made up 0.1% of the total number of all children supported. Spending to support these children made up an average of 7% of all children's services spending - almost £12 million or £192,000 per child annually. When broken down this was:

- > 15 children on average per LA costing £260,000 per year for looked after children in high cost⁵² residential placements.
- > 130 children on average per LA average of £87,000 per year for a child with an EHCP in high cost⁵³ specialist provision.

It is not surprising that those with greater needs will require greater resources. However, the degree of concentration on services for a few children is cause for concern, because of the impact on other services, particularly recognising that there is little data on the experiences or outcomes of these children.

⁵⁰ Excluding looked after children in high cost residential placements and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

⁵¹ Which includes looked after children in high cost residential placements and children with an EHCP in high cost specialist provision.

⁵² We defined high cost children's social care as over £4,000 per week on in-house or private placements.

⁵³ We defined high cost specialist provision for children in receipt of EHCP support as over £1,000 per week in term-time.

3. A substantial number of children receiving pre-statutory and targeted support are at high risk of losing out on these critical levels of support in the future

As detailed in Chapter 2 LAs voiced concern that pre-statutory support had been substantially cut and would see further reductions in the future as a result of increasing pressure within statutory services. This supported previous findings on the 60% reduction in spend on targeted early years and youth services.⁵⁴

Therefore, estimates were established on the number of children who are receiving these pre-statutory and targeted support.

Pre-statutory support included:

- d) Troubled Families programme, the funding of which is due to end in March 2020. An average of 3,000 children per local authority were receiving support at £1,600 per child annually.
- e) 'Early Help' – a broad term referring to support given to families outside of the context of statutory interventions. Our work identified an average of 4,000 children per local authority were receiving support at £3,500 per child annually.
- f) SEN support. An average of 8,600 children per local were receiving support at £700 per child annually.

Targeted support included:

- d) Targeted behavioural support, such children supported when excluded from school. This made up an average of 380 children per local authority who were receiving support at £24,000 per child annually.
- e) Mental health and well-being support, which made up an average of 520 children per local authority who were receiving support at £24,000 per child annually.
- f) Targeted youth work, which made up an average of 560 children per local authority who were receiving support at £4,900 per child annually.

Implications and recommendations for financial and strategic oversight of children's services

Research from the Local Government Association and the House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee finds that children's services in England needs £3.1bn to continue to deliver its statutory obligations.⁵⁵ This is not an extension of current services, but to enable continued implementation of the Children Act. If provided, and this is dependent on the outcome of the much delayed spending review, children's services will have seen a 68% increase in core spending from 2010/11 to 2024/25. Yet, despite this increase in funding, it is quite possible that fewer children will be

⁵⁴ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2018) Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Public-Spending-on-Children-in-England-CCO-JUNE-2018.pdf>

⁵⁵ Local Government Association, Children's care cash crisis. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/childrens-care-cash-crisis-nine-10-councils-pushed-red>; House of Commons: Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (2019). Funding of local authorities' children's services. Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1638/1638.pdf>;

receiving services at the end of it. Nor we will be able to show any benefit to the children who do access services, because no outcomes measures are collected at a national level. The result is that we could have a situation whereby funding for children's services has increased by 68%, but not be able to show any benefit for children.

The research in this reports highlights two deficiencies in collective oversight of children's services:

- 3) No attempt is made to estimate the level of demand for children's services in terms of:
 - a. The true number of vulnerable children in England likely to require help. The Department for Education's Child in Need review,⁵⁶ and the Children's Commissioners' Vulnerability Framework⁵⁷ both demonstrate the large population of children who require help;
 - b. How reductions in funding to housing, welfare and other Government services could impact on demand for statutory services. This has been accepted by Ministers⁵⁸ but the data to identify these are weak;
 - c. How reductions in other forms of children's services support impact on demand, with no clarity nationally on the number of children accessing early years support, early help services for families or youth services.

- 4) There is no framework of measurement of outcomes for children's services. This means both that there is no way to consistently assess impacts and benefits for children and families, and that the system has failed to incentivise provision in the long-term interests of children.

In a time of austerity these failures have left children's services facing an existential crisis. This research is clear that an urgent injection of substantial additional funding is required to continue services. The Children's Commissioner's accompanying work on vulnerability suggests it would take more funding still to bridge the gap between spend and need.⁵⁹ But work on spending on vulnerable children also shows that this must be combined with national action to address some of the underlying cost pressures, especially in residential care, without which, any increase in funding will be spent in increasingly inefficient ways, on an ever smaller cohort of children. At the same time more fundamental reform is required to incentivise the child protection system to promote children's long-term outcomes as well as their immediate risk.

The Children's commissioner recommends that government collect national data on the number of children supported by local agencies for children with different needs and the amount that is spent on this support.

⁵⁶ Department of Education (2019) Review of children in need. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-children-in-need/review-of-children-in-need>

⁵⁷ Children's Commissioner (2018) Children's Commissioner's annual study of childhood vulnerability in England. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/childrens-commissioner-vulnerability-report-2018/>

⁵⁸ In evidence to the HCLG Select Committee Inquiry into Children's Services. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry12/>

⁵⁹ Local Government Association. Children's services funding – facts and figures. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/childrens-services-funding-facts>

By developing a methodology for doing this analysis in a standard way across agencies working with children these authorities have also developed a tool that might be much more widely applied. Gaps in knowledge between local authorities and agencies in health, for example, mean that there is very little clarity on how children move between the different systems.

The current accounting model creates gaps in knowledge about the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. Most services are judged on the basis of the contribution to the experience and development of children but current data neglects the relationship between spending and experience and there is little real time data to advise and inform policy and practice. The Children's Commissioner is of the view that central Government should support and enable the collection and analysis of this type of financial data, as recommended by Graham Allen in 2011.⁶⁰

In general, S251 data returns and the methods underpinning them do not provide any information on which children are receiving what level of support, except in broad terms such as age or overall spending on specific statutory provision. This means at child and household level there is a lack of clarity about how need relates to spend, which translates to uncertainty at local government and national levels about the fit of services to need, leading to the issues of invisibility identified by the Children's Commissioner and inadequate data to inform Spending Review decisions. The lack of a link between specific spending programmes and the children that benefit also means that there is little data on the outcomes associated with spending, hindering evaluation and work on the efficiency and effectiveness of children's services.

This suggests that improving the specification of financial data to be clearly linked to specific groups of children and making better connection between this and data on children could substantially improve policy and practice knowledge about trends in need and the fit and value of services. There is a need for long-term improvements to the data, building on the methods used set out in this report.

It would be useful if the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, National Audit Office, Local Government Association, relevant Government Departments and others might work with the Children's Commissioner to develop an audit model to accompany the data such that it might augment or better replace some of the current conventions, such as S251.

⁶⁰ Graham Allen, 2011. "Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings." The Second Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government HM Government, June, 2011.

Annex

Table 16 - net expenditure and net expenditure inclusive of grants: average proportion of total spend and per child spend for LAs in the sample in 2017/18

	% of net expenditure	Spend per child (net expenditure)	% of net expenditure (incl. grants)	Spend per child (net expenditure incl. grants)
High cost LAC	3%	£236,000	2%	£239,000
high cost EHCP	4%	£57,000	5%	£79,000
LAC	22%	£50,000	18%	£52,000
UASC	0%	£9,000	1%	£37,300
CPP	3%	£8,800	2%	£8,900
EHCP	17%	£9,500	20%	£13,600
Youth offending	1%	£6,300	1%	£8,400
Permanency	7%	£6,700	6%	£6,800
CIN	6%	£7,700	5%	£8,000
Troubled Families	0%	£460	1%	£1,500
Early Help	4%	£3,200	3%	£3,300
SEN support	2%	£470	3%	£630
targeted behavioural	2%	£15,800	3%	£24,500
targeted early years	4%	£3,600	5%	£5,600
Mental health & well-being	1%	£20,800	1%	£20,400
targeted youth	2%	£3,800	1%	£4,300
school related	6%	£140	6%	£170
Universal early years	9%	£1,500	14%	£2,600
Universal youth	1%	£750	1%	£750
Unapportioned staffing	1%		1%	
Overheads	5%		3%	
TOTAL	100%		100%	



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