

REPORT TO: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: September 8th 2016

REPORT TITLE: Activity overview of 'Children in Need', 'Child Protection' and 'Looked-After children' in Enfield: 2015/16

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PURPOSE OF REPORT: This report is designed to inform members about levels of activity locally for children who are defined as being 'in need', including those children for who the local authority has had to initiate child protection processes and those children who are in the care of the Council.

The report provides locally available information and (where comparative data is available), will benchmark the data with statistical neighbours.

The report needs to be read in conjunction with reports from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the annual Independent Reviewing Officer report.

SUMMARY: This report is designed to update the Scrutiny Committee about workload and activity levels and trends and follows on from similar reports presented to the Committee in Autumn 2015.

1. BACKGROUND

Children in Need

All the work of Enfield's Children's social work teams is regulated by the statutory framework of the Children Act and other associated legislation (e.g. Adoption legislation, Leaving Care Act).

The Children Act 1989 provides the statutory framework for local authority services in respect to 'children in need'

It shall be the general duty of every local authority.....

- a) *to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in need , and*
- b) *so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.*

Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 has historically defined a child as being 'in need' if:

- *He or she is unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without provision of services from the LA;*
- *His or her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of services from the LA;*
- *He or she has a disability.*

The definition includes any child or young person under the age of 18.

Child Protection

Within the definition of 'Children in Need' outlined above, there are a group of children where the local authority has to initiate its Child Protection duties, powers and statutory responsibilities.

Where a local authority.....have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the authority shall make, or cause to be made, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

(Children Act 1989: Section 47)

Social workers within our children's social work teams have to be conversant with the above legislation and must also have regard to:-

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (H.M. Government: 2015)
- Pan-London Child Protection Procedures (London Safeguarding Children Board : 2015)

Our work with vulnerable children and their families is therefore by definition, of a statutory nature, is highly regulated and subject to regular external inspection.

Looked-After Children

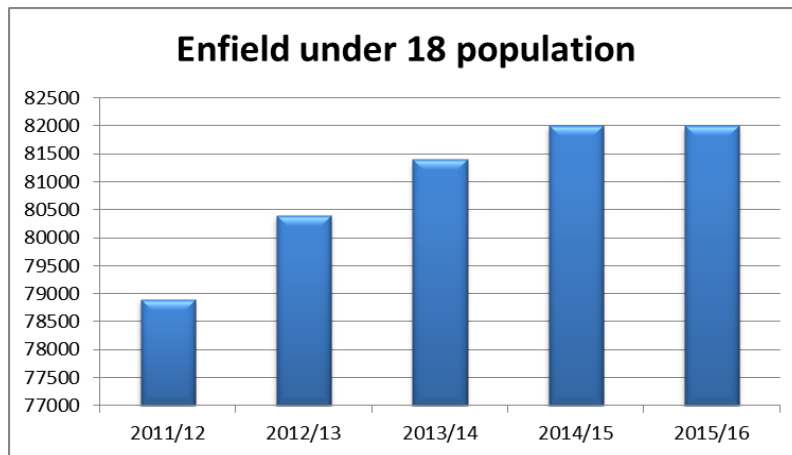
Sadly, some children cannot be safely cared for within their own families or family networks and these children will enter the care of the Council, either through a voluntary arrangement with their parents (Section 20: Children Act 1989) or via the making of a Care Order (Section 31: Children Act 1989).

Enfield's care population also includes 'Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking children (UASC) who are living in the UK without any parent or relative and for whom the local authority has therefore to assume a parental duty.

2. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The impact of recent demographic change

As reported last year, Enfield has experienced significant change over the last few years in terms of the size and nature of its population; this has included an increase in the baseline child population together with an increase in the numbers of children in Enfield who are living in poverty.



As well as the increase in child population, Enfield has also been dramatically affected by the changes associated with the Welfare Reform agenda. The most recent available data from IDACI (The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families. Their data concludes that Enfield is the 13th most deprived borough nationally and the 5th most deprived in London. The London Boroughs with greater levels of deprivation than Enfield have smaller baseline populations, meaning that Enfield now has the largest number of children living in poverty of any London borough.

It is well-researched that the demand for children’s social care services is closely related to the level of ‘need’ within a geographical area and that the level of ‘need’ is closely related to ‘levels of parental poverty’; indeed ‘parental poverty is the most prevalent risk factor in terms of the characteristics of children being made subject to Child Protection Plans and/or becoming looked-after children.

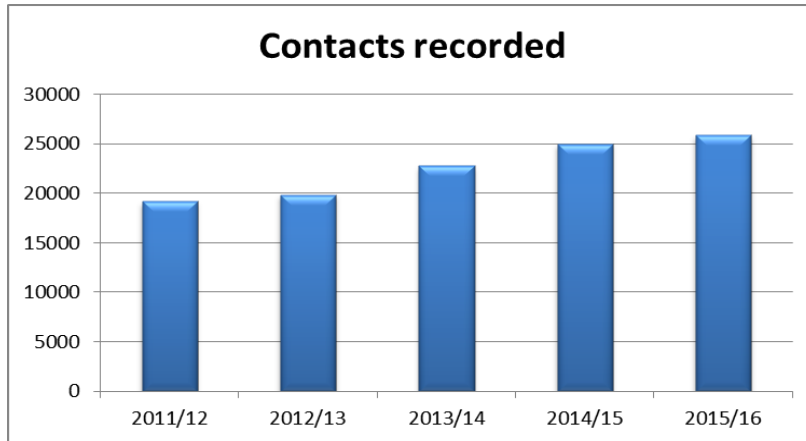
‘Research evidence showed there is an association between poverty and an increased risk of child maltreatment, particularly neglect and physical abuse (NSPCC: 2008)

Contacts, Referrals and Child Protection activity

Children’s Social Care Services receive a considerable number of ‘Contacts’ every day from professionals in other agencies (e.g. Schools, Police, Hospitals, etc.) where the contact is indicating that there is a concern about a specific child or young person.

These ‘contacts’ are then considered by a qualified and experienced social worker who will make a decision about what response should be provided to the situation and/or whether this matter needs to be responded to by a social worker in Enfield’s Assessment team . They will take into account the stated nature of the concern, previously available historical information, attitude/response of the parent/carer and any other relevant available information in making this decision.

The has been a significant increase in the number of ‘Contacts’ being made to Enfield’s children’s services in the last few years – the figures for the last five years are shown in the chart below

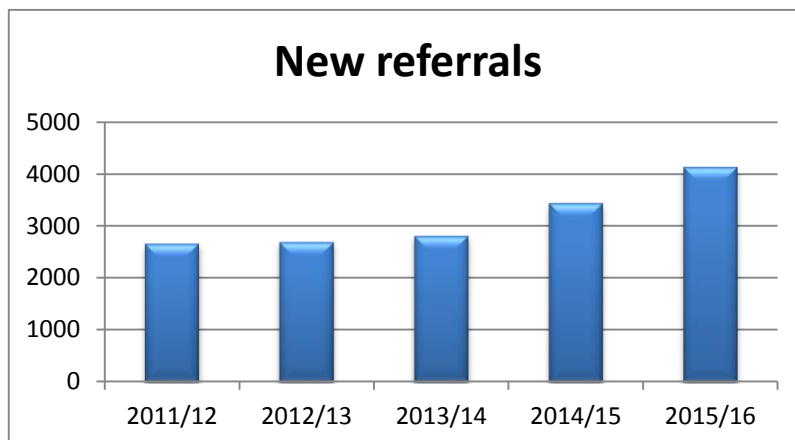


Many of these 'Contacts' are appropriately responded to, by non-statutory or 'Early Help' services e.g. Children's Centres, Parent Support Service etc. The development of Enfield's Single Point of Entry (SPOE) has greatly improved this process, by effectively dovetailing the work of both our preventive services and our statutory services, thereby ensuring that children and families are helped and supported by the most appropriate team or service.

It is known that, wherever appropriate, early help or early intervention services can have a much more significant impact in families and households than the introduction of statutory social work services. Many families will prefer to accept help from non-statutory organisations. Enfield is fortunate in that it still has a number of high-quality Early Help services e.g. Children's Centres, Parent Support Service, Domestic Violence support services etc. that can prevent the deterioration of situations within households which might otherwise then require more intensive and expensive statutory intervention.

However there still remain a significant number of cases that require referral through to children's social care – either for a 'Child & Family Assessment' or for a 'Child Protection Investigation' to take place. Such cases require a qualified social worker to undertake the casework.

The chart below shows the increase in 'referrals' to Enfield's children's social care services over the last five years

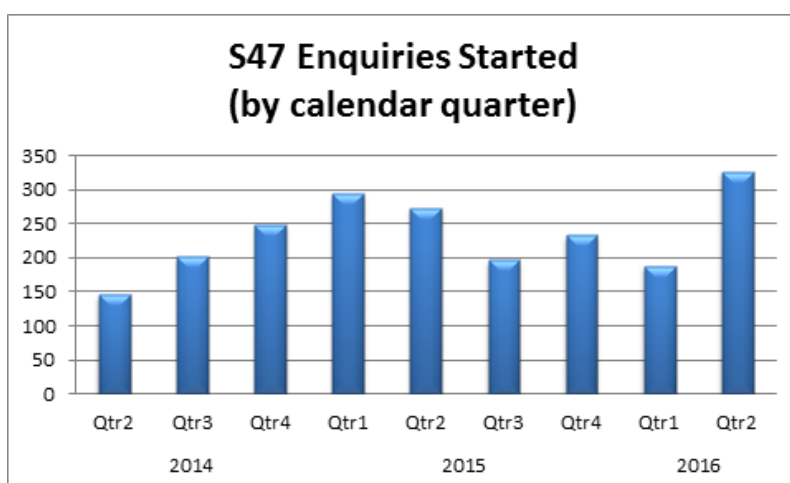


It can be seen from the above information that Enfield is currently receiving approximately 50% more referrals than we were three years ago. This is creating a considerable amount of pressure on our services and warrants further detailed consideration.

A research project has therefore been commissioned to examine this data in greater detail and to consider the reasons for this significant change. An initial hypothesis would be that the increase is closely linked to:

- Demographic changes
- Increased awareness of high profile issues such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), female genital mutilation (FGM) etc
- Improvements in notification in the area of domestic abuse/violence

Within the above referrals a certain proportion will need to be responded to via formal initiation of Child Protection Procedures (utilising Section 47 of the Children Act). The chart below shows the number of Child Protection Enquiries being opened in Enfield.



The numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans has varied significantly during the last year (please see the Independent Reviewing Officer report). We have been gradually introducing a new approach to our child protection work entitled 'Signs of Safety' - this has been endorsed by the Enfield Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB). It is possible that the introduction of this new programme is affecting some of our current statistics, so I would advise caution in interpreting this data at the present time.

At the point in time of writing this report, we have 199 Children subject to Child Protection Plans. These children are from 102 households within the borough. All children subject to Child Protection Plans must have an allocated social worker.

The information contained within the IRO report confirms that generally our performance in regard to Child Protection has been of a good standard and undertaken in a timely manner.

All of the available data about child protection activity and child protection interventions is closely monitored by Enfield's Safeguarding Children Board.

Looked-After Children (LAC)

The Overview and Scrutiny panel received detailed information last year about Enfield's LAC population. Issues and trends associated with our LAC are closely monitored by the Councils' Corporate Parenting Panel.

I will briefly summarise below key issues emerging from the data for 2015/16 (please also refer to the IRO report):

Our overall end-of year figure for LAC was very similar to that of the previous year; however some discernible differences are apparent within the cohort :-

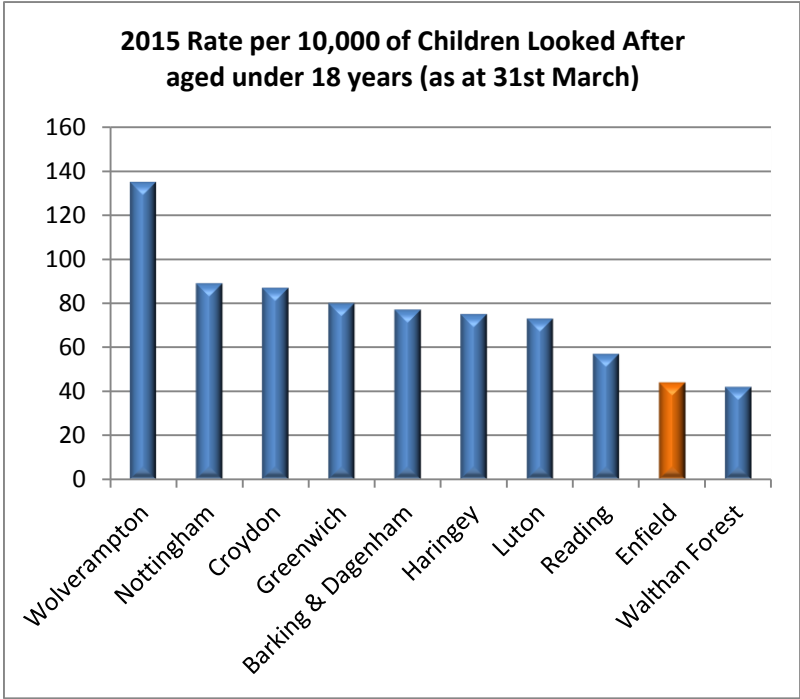
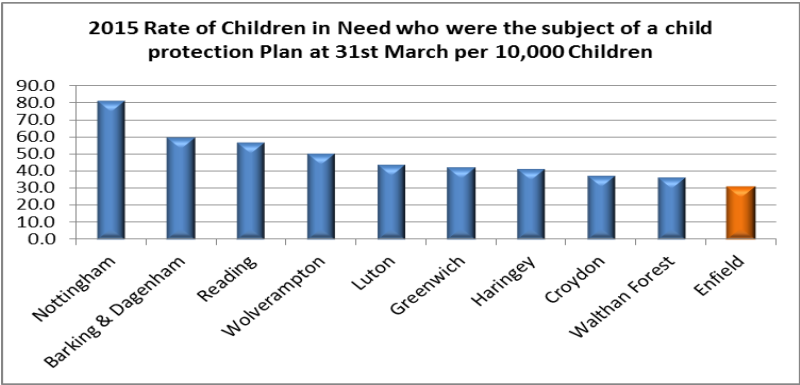
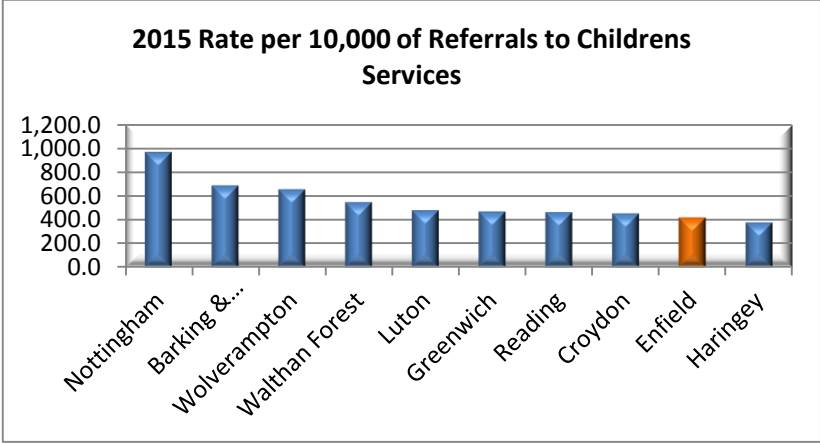
- The age –profile of Enfield’s LAC appears to have altered in the last year, with less younger children in care, counter-balanced by an increasing population of adolescents often with complex behavioural problems.
- The numbers of UASCs within the LAC population has increased significantly during 2015/16, 19.4% (70/359) at end of March 2016 were UASC, compared to 14.3% (51/356) as at March 2015. UASCs are generally aged 14 and over.
- The number of children adopted during 2015/16 is less than that in previous years, 15 adoptions in 2015/16, 19 in 2014/15
- The number of children leaving care via Special Guardianship Orders during the year was 11, which is similar to previous years.
- As at 31 March 2016 9.4% (34/359) of our LAC children have a diagnosed disability

Many adolescents who enter care have other associated difficulties – these can include gang associations, concerns re. Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), exclusion from education etc. These young people can display extremely challenging behaviour and can be very difficult to care for in family settings. Enfield’s use of residential care remains proportionately low compared to that of other local authorities. Wherever possible, we seek to place looked after children within family settings where generally their outcomes will be better than for placement in residential settings.

Comparative Data

Comparisons with comparable local authorities can be informative; Enfield’s current ‘family’ of statistically similar local authorities are Waltham Forest, Croydon, Greenwich, Birmingham, Haringey, Luton, Barking & Dagenham, Reading, Nottingham and Wolverhampton.

The most recent available information about the number of children referred to Children’s Services or made subject to Child Protection Plans or being looked after in these local authorities is outlined below.



In considering why different local authorities have varying levels of statutory work (i.e. Child Protection and LAC), researchers have concluded that levels of activity are a 'function of need' and three significant variables:

- Prevention – quality and availability of services
- Risk thresholds – how local authorities interpret and exercise their statutory responsibilities
- Throughput/Discharge – effective and efficient systems for progressing casework.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee note the content of this report and the information it contains.

4. NEXT STEPS

The committee is asked to consider whether it wishes to receive further updating reports on the subjects contained within this report.