

Early years cuts 'pushing more children into care' in England ^[1]

Children's commissioner says nearly half of budget is spent on 73,000 children in care system

Author: Butler, Patrick

Source: The Guardian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 11 Jun 2018

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Increasing numbers of children will "fall through the gaps" into the care system, risking school exclusion or falling prey to gang violence, because of cuts to early years and youth services, the children's commissioner for England has warned.

Anne Longfield said cuts of 60% to Sure Start and other preventative services since 2009 had effectively removed vital safety nets for at-risk youngsters and families and left them vulnerable to falling into extreme need.

She called for a reversal of trends in recent years which have resulted in shrinking resources focused on rapidly expanding and increasingly financially unsustainable high-cost child protection and care services at the expense of prevention budgets.

Longfield said: "Children do not arrive in extreme need overnight and many could be prevented from getting to that point if we helped them sooner in a more effective way. We are, in effect, attempting to manage and contain crisis in children's lives after allowing it to escalate.

"The economic and social costs are unsustainable. The cost to the state will ultimately be greater, but it is the lifetime cost to these children which we should be most troubled by. They only have one childhood, one chance to grow up.

"Already we see the costs of helping children later in life, or of allowing greater numbers to become marginalised – in the current pressures on family courts, special schools and the care system; in spiralling numbers of school exclusions and the consequent increase in younger and younger children linked to violent street gangs."

Longfield, who was introducing a study of public spending on children between 2000 and 2020, carried out by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, said England now spent nearly half its entire children's budget on the 73,000 children in the care system – leaving the other half for 11.7 million youngsters. Overall, 72% of children's services budgets went towards helping families in severe need.

Spending on children's services doubled in the first decade of the 21st century to a high point of £9.7bn in 2009-10, before falling away by 11% in real terms under austerity budgets, the study shows. Young people's services were cut from £1.4bn to £0.5bn between 2009-10 and 2016-17, while £1bn was lopped from the Sure Start spending over the same period.

Between 2009-10 and 2016-17, spending on looked-after children increased by 22%, driven in part by increases in children going into care after the Baby P case in 2007 from about 60,000 in 2008 to 73,000 by 2017. Children formally assessed as in need rose from 376,000 in 2010 to about 389,000 in 2016, while children subject to a child protection plan rose from 40,000 to about 50,000 over the same period.

Richard Watts, chairman of the Local Government Association's children and young people board, said: "This report paints a stark picture of the reality facing councils, who cannot keep providing this standard of support without being forced to take difficult decisions and cut back on early intervention services which help to prevent children entering the care system in the first place."

Related link:

Region: Europe ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/06/early-years-cuts-pushing-more-children-care-england>
Links

^[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/06/early-years-cuts-pushing-more-children-care-england> ^[2]

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jun/12/early-years-cuts-pushing-more-children-into-care-in-england> ^[3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe>