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Looked After Children / Children in Need



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Introduction

There are a number of reasons why a child may be 'looked after' or 'in need'. Most frequently it is because the child's parents or guardians are unable to care for them properly, have been neglecting their needs, or the child has committed a serious offence. Sometimes it is at the request of the parents in a voluntary arrangement or the parents are no longer present.

A **Looked After Child** (LAC) or is a child who is housed by the Local Authority instead of their parents. This can often be a temporary arrangement while a family is in crisis, though it can also lead to a permanent rehoming where a child cannot ever be safely returned home. 'Looked After' is a term introduced in the Children's Act 1989 and many legal aspects have also been amended or updated in the Children and Families Act 2015.

A **Child in Need** (CIN) is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired, without the provision of services, or the child is disabled.

Facts and Figures

Looked After Children

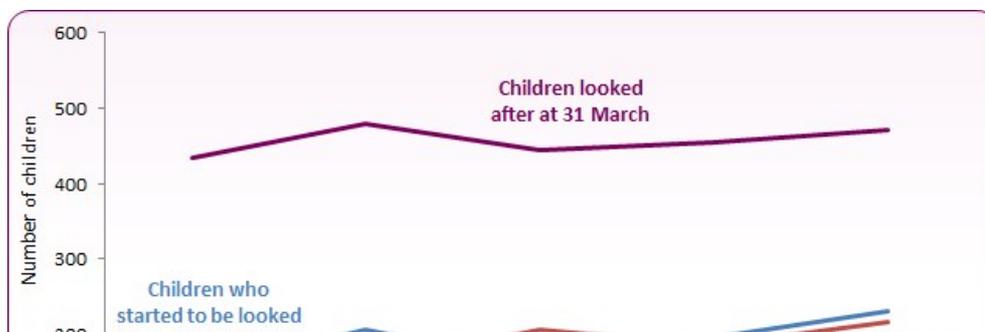
Looked After Children (LAC) in Blackpool 2015/16¹:

- The number of LAC in Blackpool increased this year from 455 in 2015 to 470 in 2016, an increase of 3.3%.
- Blackpool has a LAC rate of 164 per 10,000 children, more than twice the national average of 60 per 10,000
- Blackpool has the highest rate of LAC in England, followed by Middlesbrough and Southampton.
- While the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children continues to rise nationally, none of Blackpools LAC are from this group.
- LAC in Blackpool are significantly more likely to be up to date with their **immunisations**

Looked after status changes frequently throughout the year. New children become looked after and current children are returned home or rehoused. During 2015/16:

- 230 children became looked after
- 215 stopped being looked after
- A net change over the year of 15 children no longer needing to be looked after.
- Overall, a total of 680 children were looked after during the year (excluding those only looked after under a series of short term placements)

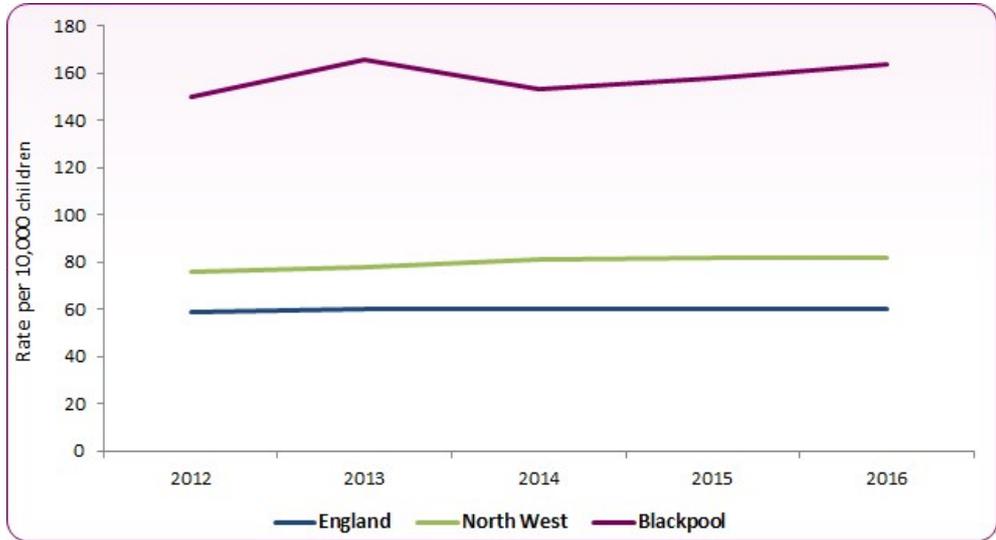
Figure 1: Trend in the number of looked after children in Blackpool





Source: Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2016 (SFR 41/2016)

Figure 2: Trend in the rate of looked after children, England, North West and Blackpool



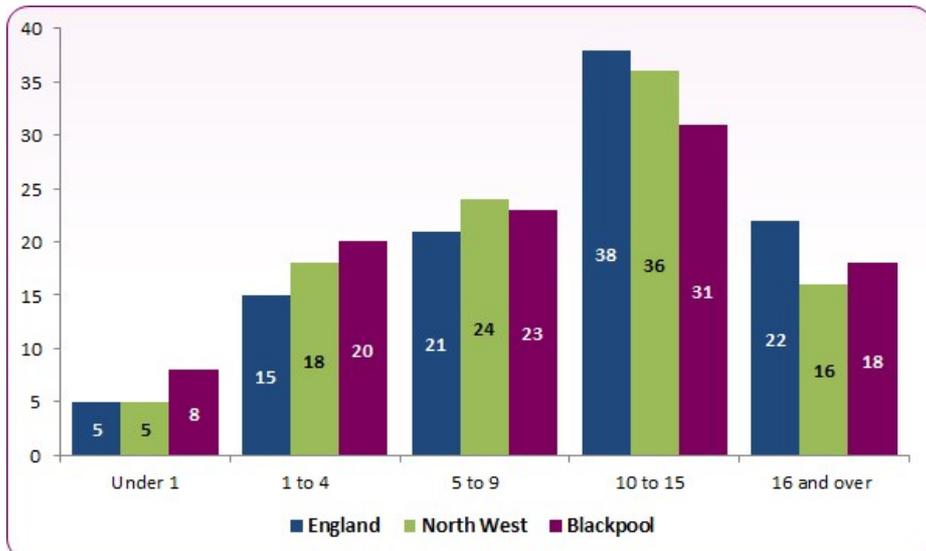
Source: Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2016 (SFR 41/2016)

Figure 2 shows the trend in the rate of LAC for Blackpool compared to the North West and England. The chart highlights that Blackpool has significantly higher rates of LAC relative to the national and regional average and is further highlighted by the fact that Blackpool has the highest rate of all local authorities in the country. One special cause consideration might be the level of deprivation in the town, or the policies adopted by the local authority. The majority of authorities with significantly high rates of looked after children are urban and there is a moderate relationship between the level of deprivation in an area and the corresponding rate of LAC.

The demographic profile of looked after children shows:

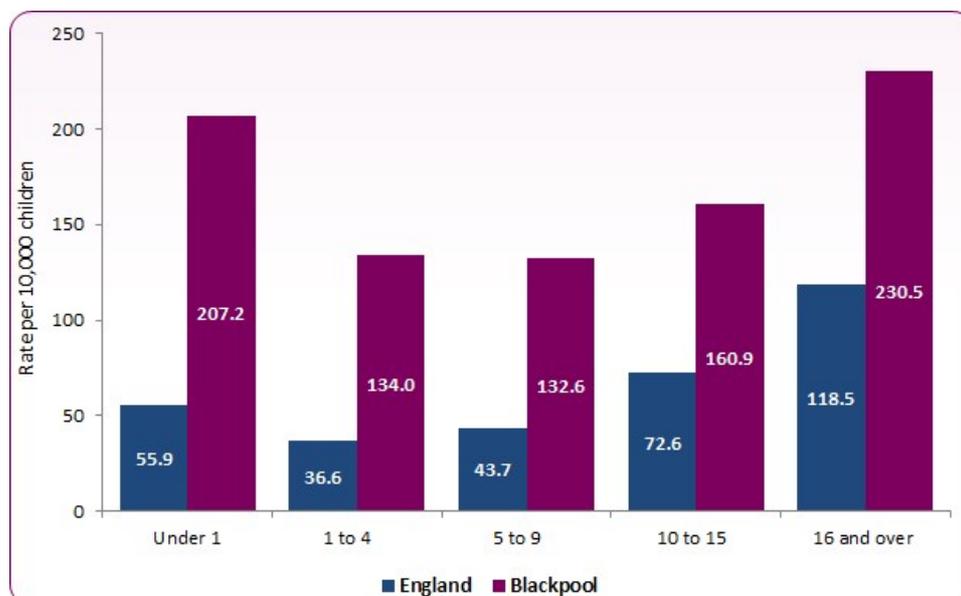
- Slightly more boys (55%) than girls (45%) are looked after.
- The majority of LAC are white ethnicity (93%) and 4% of mixed heritage.
- The ages of LAC show a small bias towards younger age groups in Blackpool.
- Children aged between 10 and 15 years represent the majority of the looked after population (31%) in Blackpool as in the country nationally (Figure 3).
- In Blackpool, children under five year old make up a significantly higher proportion of looked after children than the national average, 28% compared to 20% nationally.
- The rate of looked after children aged under 5 is over 3.5 times higher in Blackpool than the national average (Figure 4)

Figure 3: Age profile of Looked After Children - % looked after by age group



Source: Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2015 (SFR 34/2015)

Figure 4: Looked After Children by age group - rate per 10,000 children, 2014/15



Source: Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2015 (SFR 34/2015)

Reasons for becoming 'Looked After'

For new children becoming looked after during 2014/15²:

- Abuse and neglect was the largest initial reason for becoming LAC, 71% of all cases in Blackpool.
- A further 13% were taken into care due to the family being in acute distress, essentially a family crisis point requiring a safeguarding intervention.
- The reasons why children in Blackpool become looked after have remained fairly stable over the last few years though family stress has replaced family dysfunction as the second most common reason for children becoming looked after.

For children who ceased being looked after the majority were returned to their families (60 children), adopted (50 children) or became subject to special guardianship orders (30 children). A special guardianship order confers parental responsibilities to the guardian but does not change the legal relationship of birth parents with their children.

Looked After Children in Blackpool - variations by area

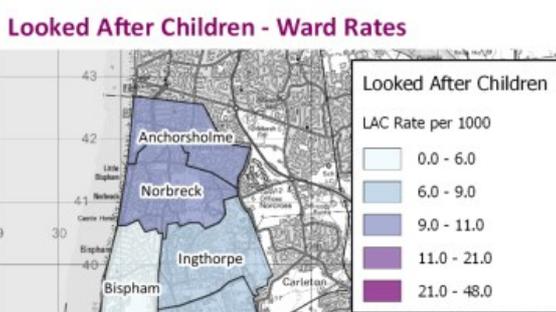
An analysis of LAC using MOSAIC, a geodemographic profiling tool, highlighted that just over 60% of the children originated from households in two MOSAIC groups:

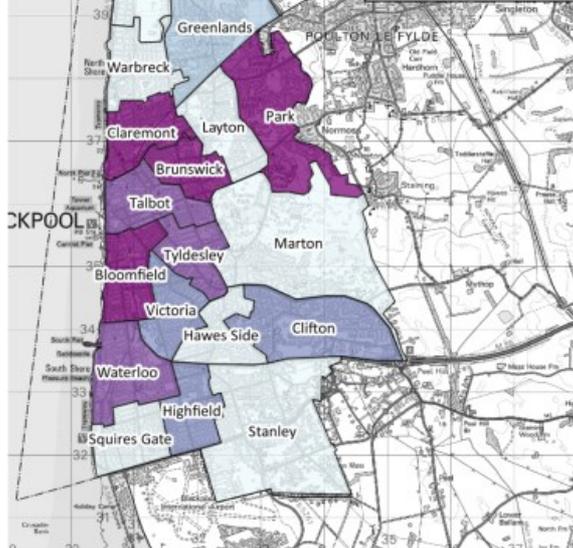
Mosaic Group L: Transient Renters: Single people privately renting low cost homes for the short term	43%
Mosaic Group M: Family Basics: Families with limited resources who have to budget to make ends meet	21%

The distribution of these groups across Blackpool may be a useful starting point for developing geographic or demographically targeted interventions. More information on the [MOSAIC profile of Blackpool](#) can be found in the population section.

Figure 5 highlights the spatial distribution of LAC by examining the recorded address at the time a child became looked after. It clearly shows higher rates in the more deprived wards within central Blackpool.

Figure 5: Looked After Children - Ward rates





Data Source: Framework1 Business Intelligence 2015

Figure 5 highlights:

- The highest rates of children becoming looked after are for Park and Bloomfield wards with rates per 1000 population aged 0-17 at nearly triple the overall Blackpool rate (equivalent to 15 per 1000).
- Brunswick also has a very high rate of looked after children compared to the Blackpool rate.
- All wards in Blackpool have contained children who have been subject to LAC arrangements however, presenting a 'background' level of need within the entire area.

Placement Type

In terms of where LAC are placed while in care, Blackpool shows no substantial differences from the England profile. The largest numbers of placements are made in foster families with a remainder placed in children's units, homes and hostels. This may provide some insight into levels of ongoing provision required to support the increasing Looked After population, for example, proactive recruitment of new Foster families or capacity checks on secure units and homes. Figure 6 shows the broad profile.

Figure 6: Placement of looked after children

	Blackpool (No.)	Blackpool (%)	England (%)
Foster placements	325	72%	75%
Placed for adoption	40	9%	5%
Placement with parents	30	7%	5%
Other placement in the community	<5		3%
Secure units, children's homes or hostels	35	8%	9%
Other residential setting	<5		2%
Residential schools	0		1%

Source: Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2015 (SFR 34/2015)

Leaving Care and Adoption for looked after children

In Blackpool, 185 LAC left care in 2014/15. 32% were returned home, 27% were adopted and 16% given a special guardianship order. Figure 7 shows all the destinations of the care leavers.

Figure 7: Destinations of care leavers, 2014/15

	Blackpool (No.)	Blackpool (%)	England (%)
Returned home to live with parents or relatives	60	32%	34%
Adopted	50	27%	17%
Special Guardianship Orders	30	16%	11%

Residence order granted	<5	-	3%
Moved into independent living (with supportive accommodation)	5	3%	9%
Moved into independent living (with no formalised support)	20	11%	3%
Care taken by another LA	0	-	1%
Sentenced to custody	<5	-	2%
Care ceased for any other reason	5	2%	16%

Source: Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2015 (SFR 34/2015)

Adoption is a particularly sensitive area and in Blackpool performance is measured over a number of indicators. Despite having the highest number of LAC per 10,000 population, 21% of care leavers were adopted in 2015/16, higher than the national average of 15%. Adoptions are increasing, in Blackpool 45 children were placed in 2015/16 compared to just 18 placed in 2010/11.

Figure 8: Adoptions 2010/12 to 2014/15

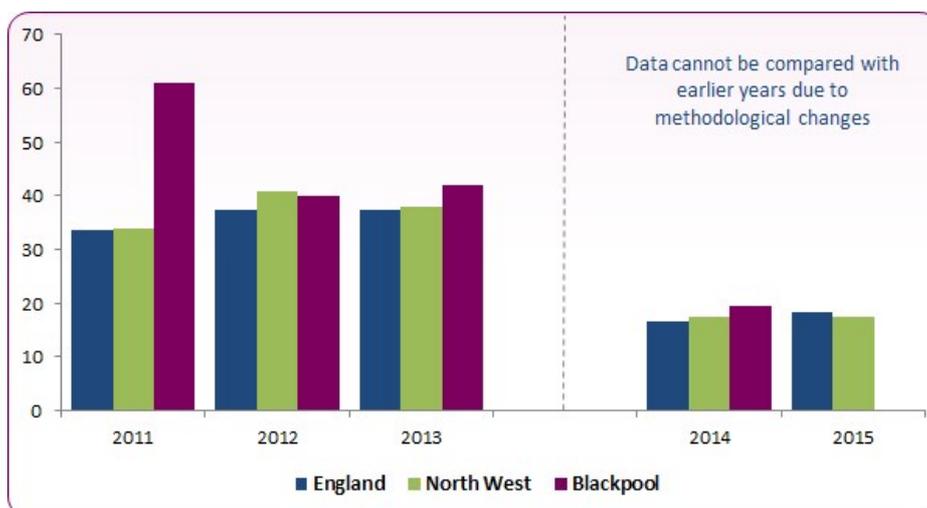
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Blackpool (No.)	18	17	22	41	50	45
Blackpool (%)	15.7%	14.5%	13.7%	20%	27%	21%
England (%)	11%	13%	14%	17%	17%	15%

Source: Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2016 (SFR 41/2016, Table LAE1)

Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities

19.4% of Blackpool's looked after children achieved 5 or more A*-C GCSEs in 2014, the latest year for which we have data. This is slightly higher than the national average of 16.5%. It is not possible to compare progress from previous years due to changes in the way qualifications are now counted but previous data from 2011 to 2013 shows Blackpool looked after children achieving higher than the national average (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Attainment at key stage 4 for children looked after - % achieving 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C



Source: DfE, Outcomes for Looked After Children, (SFR11/2016)

Figure 10 shows the number of LAC who had been continuously looked after for at least 12 months by Special Educational Need (SEN) and the number of school exclusions in the LAC population. Although Blackpool has a lower proportion of school exclusions in the LAC population than the national average, this rate is still almost 2.5 times higher than the exclusion rate in the general school population.

Figure 10: Special Educational Needs and school exclusions of looked after children

	Blackpool (No.)	Blackpool (%)	North West (%)	England (%)

Special Educational Needs (SEN)-2015					
Number of LAC who had been continuously looked after for at least 12 months		215			
Number of LAC with the following provision for SEN:	No SEN	110	50.9%	43.6%	39.5%
	SEN without statement or education, health and care plan	60	28.0%	31.7%	32.9%
	SEN with a statement or education, health and care plan	45	21.0%	24.7%	27.6%
Total with SEN		105	49.1%	56.4%	60.5%
Exclusions from school-2014					
LAC with at least one fixed period exclusion		19	9.4%	8.9%	10.3%

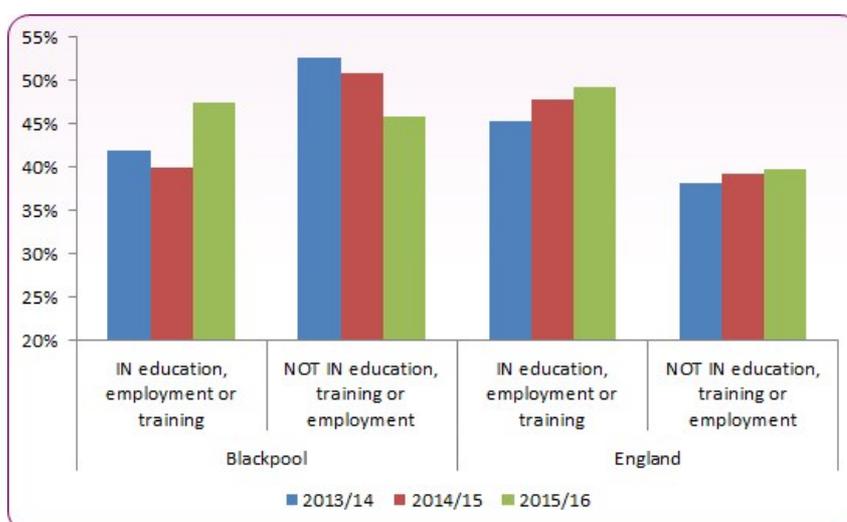
Source: DfE, *Outcomes for Looked After Children*, (SFR11/2016)

Transition from local authority care - Care Leavers

Care leavers cover children looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, including some time after their 16th birthday. Blackpool continues to stay in touch with more care leavers and 'in touch' information is now published for care leavers up to the age of 21. In 2015/16:

- 112 (93%) of the 19,20 and 21 year old care leavers in Blackpool were in touch with the local authority
- This was a slight decrease from 95% in 2014/15, though is the same as the national average.
- The percentage 'in touch' varies by age; 91% of 19 year olds were in touch, compared to 93% of 20 year olds and 97% of 21 year olds in Blackpool.
- The proportions 'in touch' in Blackpool increase with age; nationally these proportions decrease as care leavers get older.
- All the care leavers aged 17-18 years (44) were in touch with the local authority.
- The proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training was 47.5% similar to the national average of 49.3% (Figure 11)
- The proportion not in education, employment or training (NEET) was 45.8%, higher than the national average of 39.8%, though this has fallen from 52.7% in 2013/14.

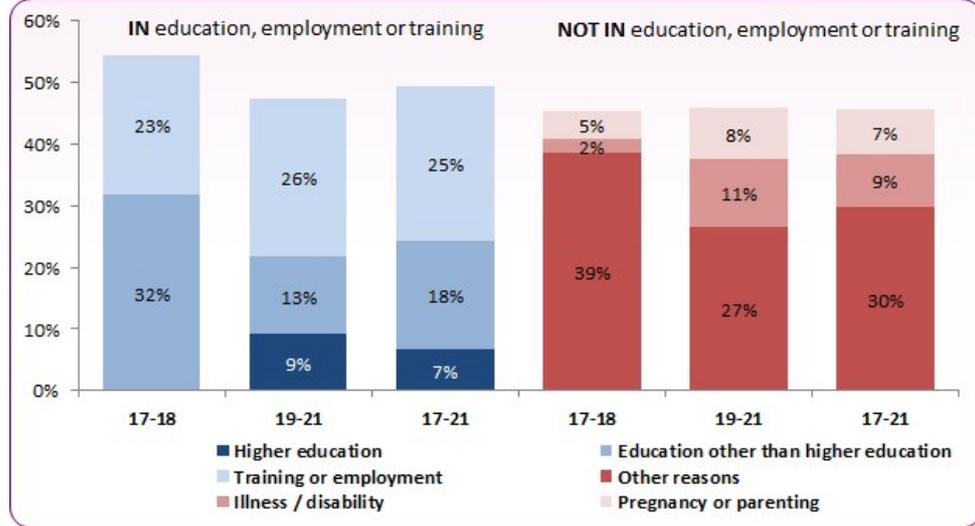
Figure 11: Proportion of care leavers (age 19,20 and 21 years) who are 'IN' and 'NOT IN' education, employment or training, Blackpool and England, 2015/16



Source: Blackpool Council, Business Intelligence Team, *Summary of Care Leavers*

- Proportions of young people leaving care who are NEET have been falling across all age groups in Blackpool and 49% are now in some form of education or employment.
- NEET due to illness/disability or pregnancy/parenting was 7% in 17-18 year olds and 19% in 19-21 year olds.
- NEET due to 'other reasons' is high and it would be useful to investigate what those reasons are that prevent young care leavers from accessing employment or education (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Proportions of care leavers by age group and type, Blackpool, 2015/16



Source: Blackpool Council, Business Intelligence Team, Summary of Care Leavers

- 101 of the former care leavers (84.2%) aged 19-21 years in Blackpool in 2015/16 were in accommodation considered suitable.
- a further 11 (9.2%) were in accommodation considered unsuitable and for 8 (6.7%) the accommodation suitability wasn't known.
- 93% of 17-18 year old care leavers are in accommodation considered suitable.

Children in Need

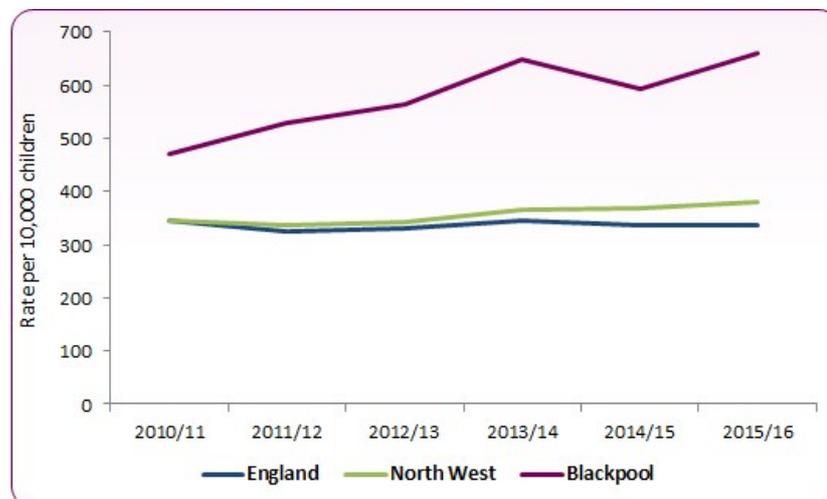
Children in Need (CiN) in Blackpool 2015/16³:

- The number of CiN in Blackpool increased this year from 1,706 in 2014/15 to 1,897 in 2015/16, an increase of 11%.
- Blackpool has a CiN rate of 661 per 10,000 children, almost twice the national average of 338 per 10,000.
- Blackpool has the third highest rate of CiN in England, after Southampton and Middlesbrough.
- Since 2010/11, Blackpool has seen a 40% increase in the rate of CiN compared to a stable national picture (Figure 13)

The number of CiN changes frequently throughout the year. New children become in need and current children cease to be in need. During 2015/16 (Figure 14):

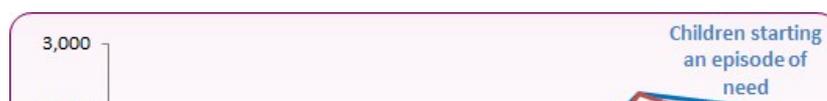
- 2,523 started an episode of need.
- 2,305 ended an episode of need
- A net change over the year of 216 more children being in need.
- Overall, a total of 4,202 children were in need throughout 2015/16.

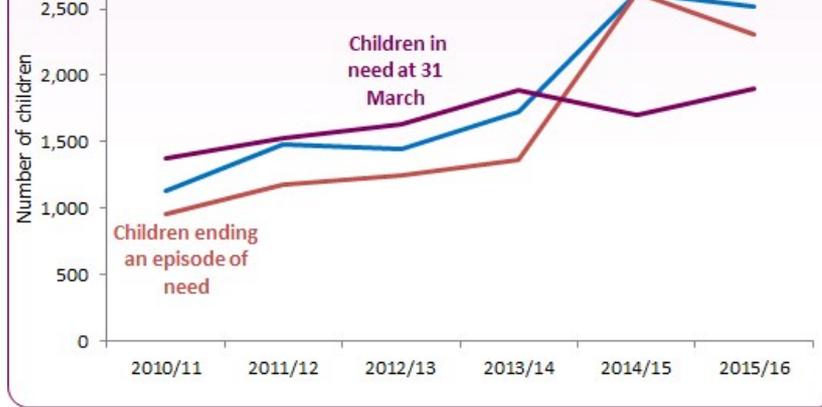
Figure 13: Trend in the rate of children in need, England, North West and Blackpool



Source: Dept for Education, Characteristics of children in need (SFR 52/2016)

Figure 14: Trend in the number of children in need in Blackpool





Source: Dept for Education, Characteristics of children in need (SFR 52/2016)

Concerns about maltreatment may be the reason for a referral to local authority children's social care or concerns may arise during the course of providing services to the child and family. In these circumstances, local authority children's social care must initiate enquiries to find out what is happening to the child and whether protective action is required.

A referral is defined as a request for services to be provided by children's social care and is in respect of a child who is not currently 'in need'. A referral may result in: an assessment of the child's need; the provision of information or advice, referral to another agency; or no further action. Across Blackpool there were no referrals that resulted in 'no further action' and 20% of referrals were within 12 months of a previous referral³. Figure 15 compares referral, assessment and child protection plan rates in Blackpool with the North West and England.

Figure 15: Children in need - referrals and assessments 2015/16

	Blackpool		North West	England	
	Number	Rate/10,000	Rate/10,000	Rate/10,000	
Number of referrals during the year	2,523	879.6	583.6	532.2	
Assessments completed by children's social care services	1,622	565.5	567.4	489.5	
Episodes with assessment factor information*	1,258				
Children who were subject to:-	section 47 enquiries**	1,371	478.0	174.9	147.5
	an initial stage child protection conference	567	197.7	79.5	62.6
Children who were the subject of a child protection plan	518	180.6	69.7	54.2	
Children who were the subject of a child protection plan as at 31 March	364				

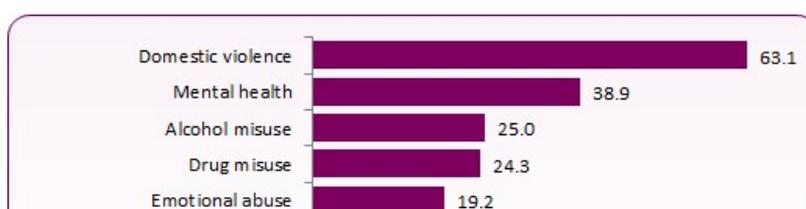
*excludes those episodes where no factors were identified, ** section 47 refers to enquiries conducted under the provisions of section 47 of the Children Act 1989

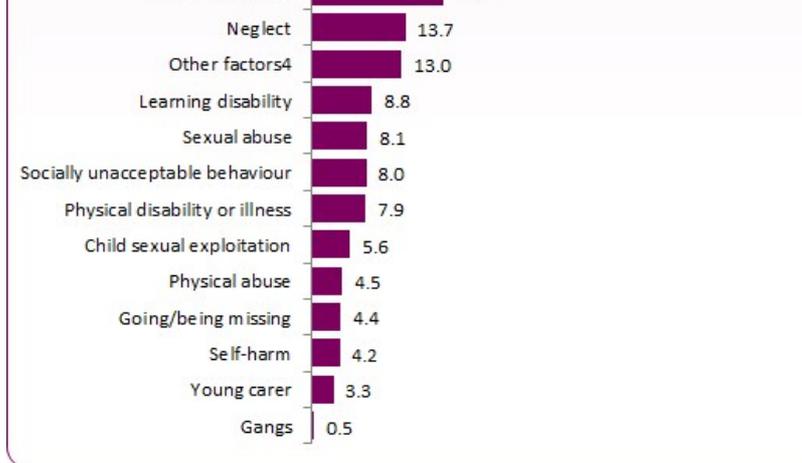
Source: Dept for Education, Characteristics of children in need (SFR 52/2016)

Abuse or neglect was the most common primary need at assessment for children in need in 2015/16 - this year 59% of children in Blackpool had abuse or neglect as their primary need identified at assessment, followed by family in acute stress with 12% and family dysfunction at 8%.

Across Blackpool there were 1,258 assessment where factors could be identified. Domestic violence, which includes that aimed at children or other adults in the household, was the most common factor identified at the end of the assessment - this year almost two thirds (63.1%) of children in need in Blackpool had domestic violence as a factor identified. This is significantly higher than the national average of 49.6%. After domestic violence, mental health and alcohol/drug misuse were identified factors (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Percentage of children in need by factors identified at the end of assessment, Blackpool, 2015/16





Source: Dept for Education, Characteristics of children in need (SFR 52/2016)

Child Protection Plans

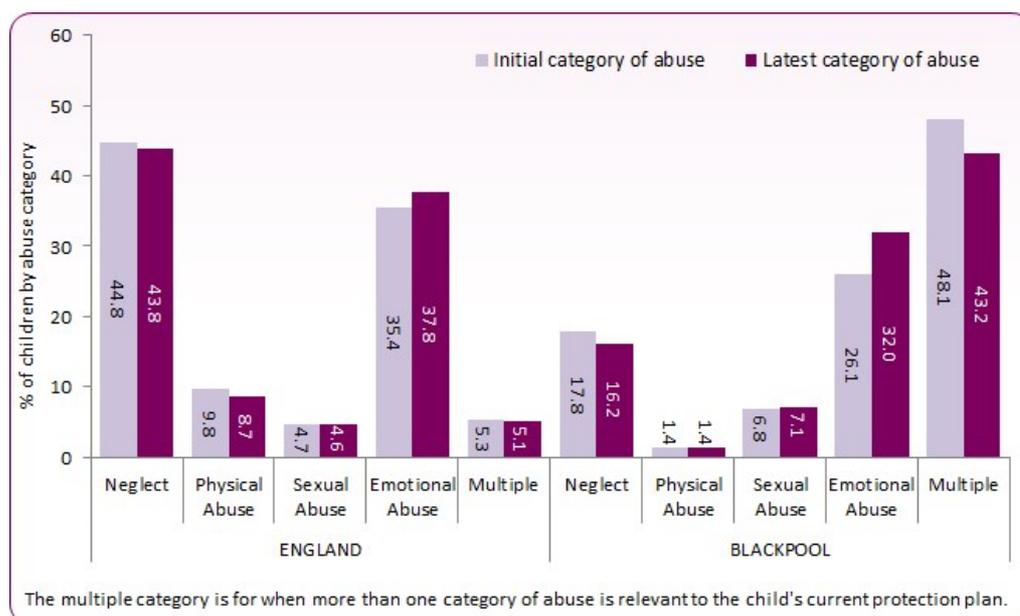
Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, have a duty to make enquiries under [section 47](#) of the Children Act 1989 if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out.

At the initial child protection conference the decision is made as to whether the child needs to become the subject of a child protection plan. When a child becomes the subject of a plan, the initial category of abuse is recorded. Plans are then reviewed on a regular basis and a child should no longer be the subject of a plan if it is judged they are no longer at risk or harm.

- During 2015/16, 1,371 children in Blackpool were the subject of section 47 enquiries
- The Blackpool rate of 478.0 per 10,000 children is over three times the national average of 147.5
- 518 became the subject of a child protection plan, an increase from 455 during 2014/15
- The rate of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan is 180.6 per 10,000 children, significantly higher than the national average of 54.2.

Figure 17 shows the proportion of children who became the subject of a child protection plan by initial and latest category of abuse. While the main category of abuse across England is neglect followed by emotional abuse, in Blackpool the majority of children (over 40%) have more than one category of abuse recorded on their protection plan.

Figure 17: The proportion of children who became the subject of a child protection plan by initial and latest category of abuse during 2015/16, Blackpool and England



Source: Dept for Education, Characteristics of children in need (SFR 52/2016)

National and local strategies

Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children. Statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England (Department of Health & Department of Education, 2015)

The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Statement 2016-2018 document sets out how Blackpool Council intends to

meet the Sufficiency Duty. It also emphasises the Council's commitment to children and young people who are in the care of the local authority or on the edge of care to ensure that their life chances and outcomes are improved.

Recommendations

The main points from the **Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children** guidance are:

- The corporate parenting responsibilities of local authorities include having a duty under section 22(3)(a) of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children they look after, including eligible children and those placed for adoption, regardless of whether they are placed in or out of authority or the type of placement. This includes the promotion of the child's physical, emotional and mental health and acting on any early signs of health issues.
- The local authority that looks after the child must arrange for them to have a health assessment as required by *The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010*.
- The initial health assessment must be done by a registered medical practitioner. Review health assessments may be carried out by a registered nurse or registered midwife.
- The local authority that looks after the child must ensure that every child it looks after has an up-to-date individual health plan, the development of which should be based on the written report of the health assessment. The health plan forms part of the child's overall care plan.
- When a child starts to be looked after, changes placement or ceases to be looked after, the responsible local authority should notify, among others, the CCG – or, in the case of a placement out of authority, both the originating and the receiving CCG (or local health board in the case of a child looked after by a local authority in England but living in Wales) – and the child's GP. If the child is moved in an emergency, the notifications should happen within five working days. Prompt notifications are essential if initial health assessments are to be completed in good time.
- Looked-after children should never be refused a service, including for mental health, on the grounds of their placement being short-term or unplanned.
- CCGs and NHS England have a duty to cooperate with requests from local authorities to undertake health assessments and help them ensure support and services to looked-after children are provided without undue delay.
- Local authorities, CCGs, NHS England and Public Health England must cooperate to commission health services for all children in their area.
- The health needs of looked-after children should be taken into account in developing the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS).
- Every local authority should have agreed local mechanisms with CCGs to ensure that they comply with NHS England's guidance on establishing the responsible commissioner in relation to secondary health care when making placement decisions for looked-after children and to resolve any funding issues that arise.
- If a looked-after child or child leaving care moves out of the CCG area, arrangements should be made through discussion between the "originating CCG", those currently providing the child's healthcare and the new providers to ensure continuity of healthcare. CCGs should ensure that any changes in healthcare providers do not disrupt the objective of providing high quality, timely care for the child.
- Local authorities, CCGs and NHS England should ensure that plans are in place to enable children leaving care to continue to obtain the healthcare they need.
- Looked-after children should be able to participate in decisions about their health care. Arrangements should be in place to promote a culture:
 - where looked-after children are listened to
 - that takes account of their views according to their age and understanding, in identifying and meeting their physical, emotional and mental health needs
 - that helps others, including carers and schools, to understand the importance of listening to and taking account of the child's wishes and feelings about how to be healthy.

[1] Dept for Education, Children looked after in England (including adoption), SFR41/2016

[2] Dept for Education, Children looked after in England, March 2015 (SFR 34/2015)

[3] Dept for Education, Characteristics of children in need: 2015 to 2016 (SFR 52/2016)

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