

# **Scrutiny Committee – Children & Families**

**September 2024**

**Deep Dive - Children Looked After**

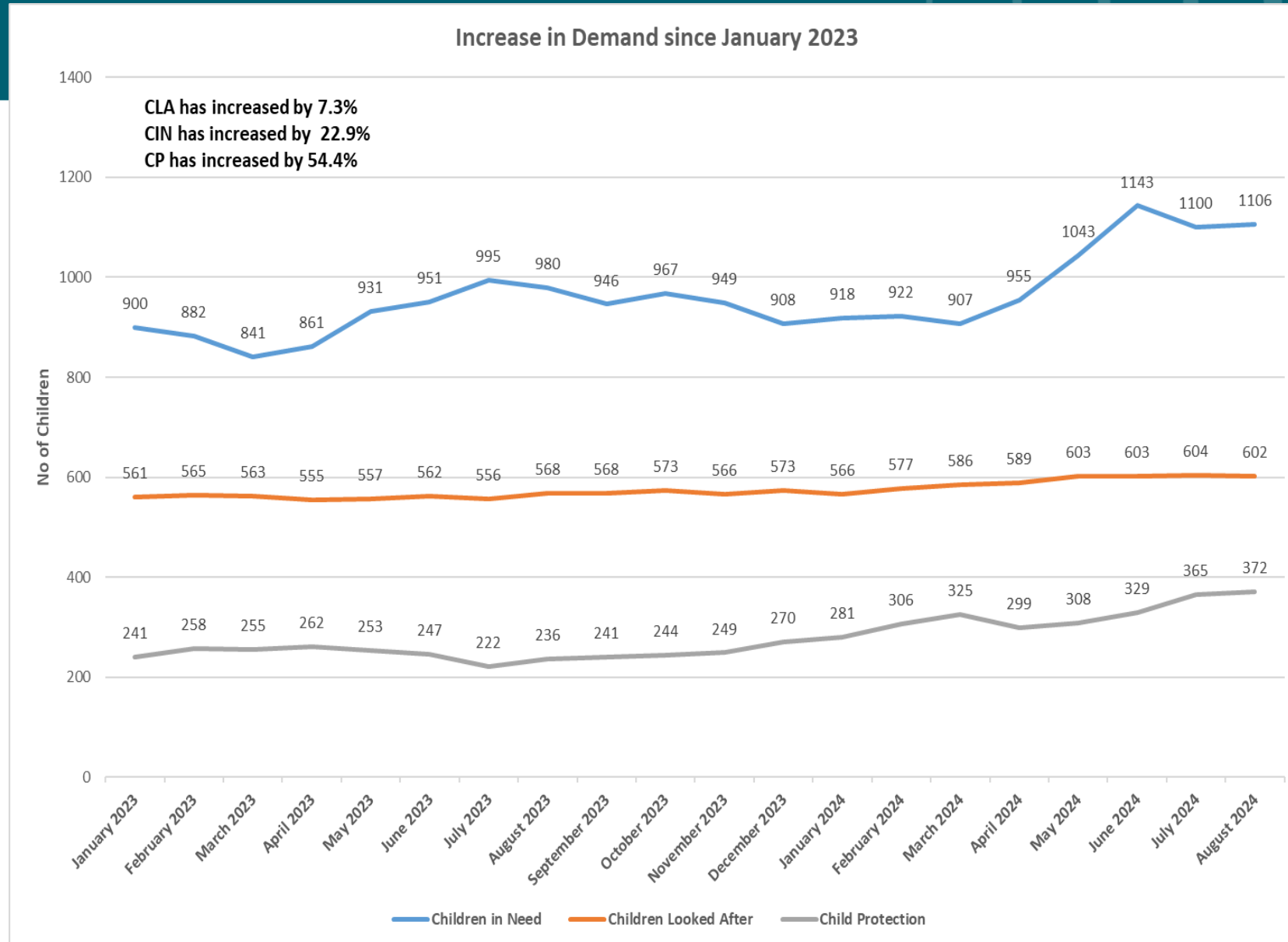
---



# Purpose

- Provide a commentary to Scrutiny Committee on the rising numbers of Children Looked After (CLA) by:
  - Comparing numbers of children becoming looked after versus those ceasing to be looked after
  - Exploring reasons for this.
  - Setting out further work to be undertaken
  - Taking direction from scrutiny for further reporting

# Demand for a service from Children's Social Care has increased in the last 18 months.



# Children Becoming Looked After

- From January 2023 – June 2024, 293 children have become looked after.

Age in years	Number of children / YP	%
0 – 2	85	29
3 – 5	26	9
5 – 10	44	15
11 – 15	78	27
16 & 17	60	20

# Children Ceasing to be Looked After

- Jan – June 2023 – 123 children left our care
- Jan – June 2024 – 100 children left our care – 19% decrease

Age in years	Jan – June 2023	%	Jan – June 2024	%
0 – 2	28	23	28	28
3 – 5	13	11	10	10
6 – 10	15	12	4	4
11 – 15	11	9	9	9
16 & 17	3	2	6	6
18+	53	43	43	43

# Reasons for ceasing to be Looked After

	2023	2024
Returned to family / connected carer	21	21
Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	16	15
Adoption	17	16

# Points to Note:

- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) remained consistent since 2021/22 - we mainly receive 16- & 17-year-olds from the NTS, so they turn 18 much quicker which reduces CLA numbers but impacts on Leaving Care provision. Dip last summer when we stopped receiving for 3 months whilst we secured accommodation with a provider.
- Children age out of care when they turn 18 years of age – bigger than average cohort in August 2024 (13 rather than 5-8) and a further larger cohort in January 2025. In the same period last year 104 children aged out whereas this year in will be 125.

# Areas being explored:

1. Length of care proceedings which impacts on children returning to family, SGO, adoption.
2. Education – the impact of attendance and exclusions
3. Reintegration and the barriers
4. Areas of growth coming in



# Length of care proceedings

- Proceedings should be completed in 26 weeks, nationally average is 37, South West region 35, Taunton courts 47 weeks
- Our discussions with legal have not highlighted any significant practice concerns but rather court delays (delays in hearings, excessive hearings, court ordered assessments, judgements not being given in a timely way)
- We continue to work closely with Cafcass, including joint auditing work and increasing our shared understanding to get it right for children.

# Education

- School places, attendance, exclusions
- Impact on families and communities
- Children in our care without a full time education package

Note: the recent exclusions project identified that 80% of the cohort of children identified by a target number of schools as being at risk of permanent exclusion were not open to Children's Services. Lack of graduated response.

# Reintegration

- Have we lost focus on reintegration due to increasing demand and complexity?
- We are exploring the 'offer' to help children reintegrate home and the sustainability of these arrangements – including role of Emotional Health & Wellbeing Team, Family Group Conference Model, extension of Family Safeguarding Model.
- Requires a dedicated resource

# Areas of growth coming in – audits undertaken

0 – 5 year olds (approx. 38% of those becoming looked after)

- All cases reviewed it was appropriate for us to be in legal framework
- Our practice was proportionate showing a graduated response and those cases that were non-accidental injuries or trigger incidents we went straight to proceedings.
- Of the cases reviewed only a third were completed in 26 weeks, with one taking 9 months for a hearing to be scheduled with still no date for final hearing.
- Of the cases reviewed 64% had a final care plan of adoption and a further 18% placed with family.

# Areas of growth coming in – audits undertaken

11 – 15 year olds - deep dive of 8 children (10% of the children that had become looked after in last 18 months)

- 1 child was a UASC, the other 7 children had previous involvement with us when younger.
- 5 of the 8 had a significant history – multiple referrals over time / Child Protection Plans or previous proceedings.
- For those with a significant history identifiable behaviours linked with trauma and or abuse.

Further quality assurance to be undertaken to look for learning.

# Further areas to explore

- What does the learning tell us?
- We are changing our supervision practice – to reflect on previous interventions to ensure we don't keep repeating the cycle of intervention – further audit work planned.
- What about the 5 – 10 age group? – is our intervention right?
- Can we change the trajectory for those aged 11-15?
- Any questions?