



**Date: 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**To the Chair and Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**Report Title: Childrens Social Care Demand Management and Neglect**

<b>Relevant Cabinet Member(s)</b>	<b>Wards Affected</b>	<b>Key Decision?</b>
Councillor Lani-Mae Ball Lead Member for Early Help, Education, Skills and Young People  Councillor Rachel Blake Lead member for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities	<b>All</b>	<b>No</b>

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

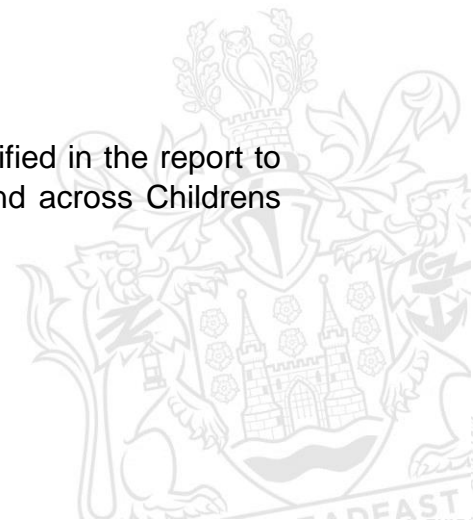
1. The purpose of this report is to consider demand and the impact of neglect on both a national and local level. The report reflects on some the key levers currently impacting on demand at all key stages of a child's journey through the social care system, acknowledging those that can be managed and influenced locally and those which cannot. Key areas of local work and practice which are aimed to safely reduce demand and ensure children and their family's needs are met earlier are also identified.

**EXEMPT REPORT**

2. This report is not exempt.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

3. That the content of the report is noted, and the actions identified in the report to safely reduce demand and ensure best value linked to spend across Childrens Social Care are understood.



## **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?**

4. The citizens of Doncaster will be assured that children and families in need of help and protection have their needs met at the right level of support and intervention. That the council and partners understand the drivers of demand for help and intervention and through working closely with partners, ensure this demand is managed and responded to wherever possible at the right level.
5. This will be supported by the Multi agency Neglect strategy and priority focus Neglect under the Doncaster Childrens Safeguarding Partnership. The aim is to have a well-informed multi agency proportionate response to need and especially neglect. This includes ensuring recognition of the casual link between the cost of living challenges, poverty, and an increase in concerning parental factors which can lead to neglect and that services work closely together to respond to need and take action to protect where necessary.

## **BACKGROUND**

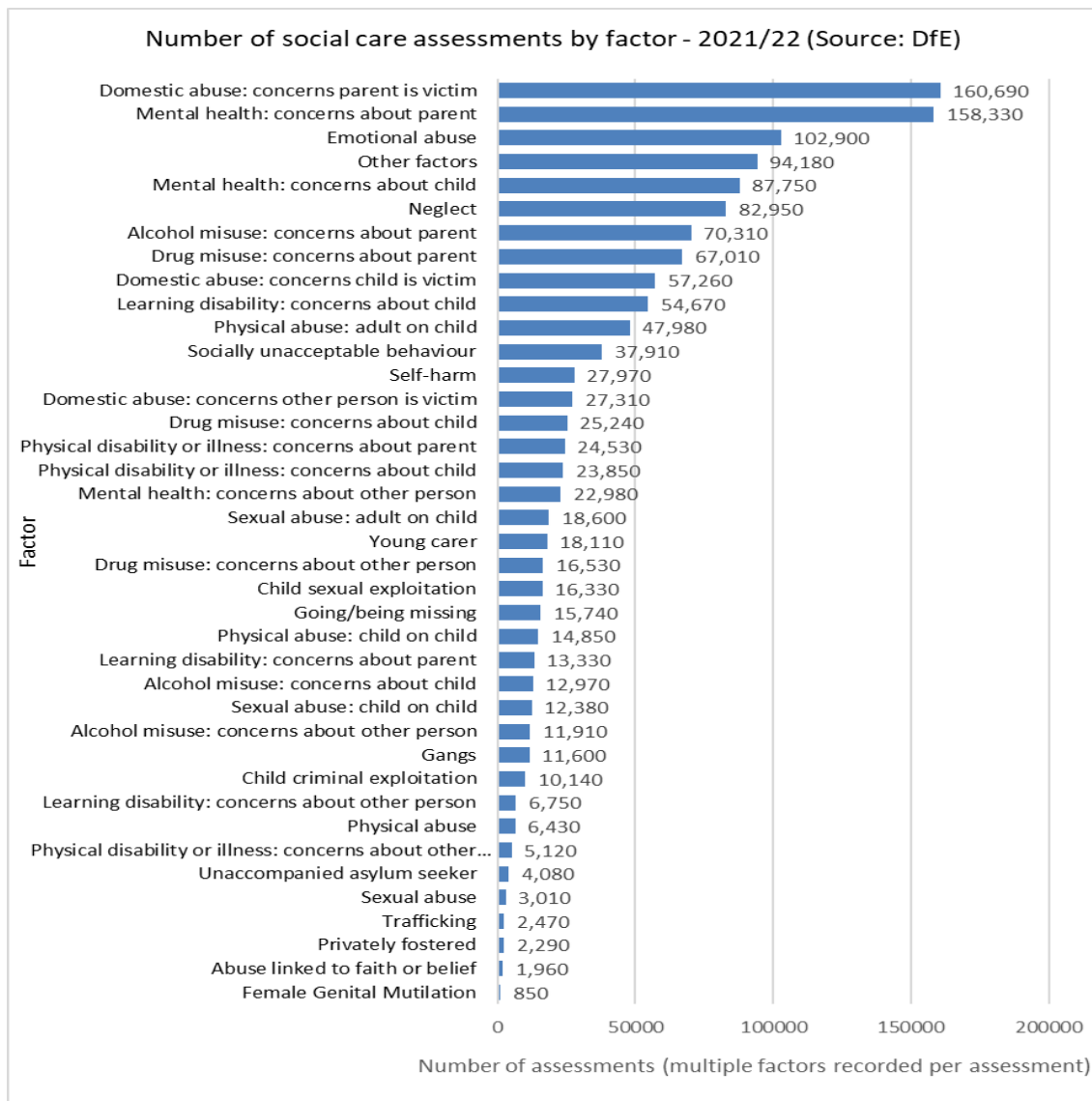
6. National Context – In the past 2 years there have been significant changes in the context children and families are living in at a local and national level. As a result, all Local Authority Councils have had to respond to how they meet need, with increasing changing demand with a reduced and finite resource. This has impacted on the services in operation as Doncaster, like other councils has had to dynamically act to respond. The ADCS pressures report in 2022 highlighted the view that Legislation and policies steered by central government left gaps where action needed to be progressed, which then created pressures and demand that Local Government has needed to manage. These pressures have been further exacerbated by the post covid recovery and the significant changes in cost of living.
7. These gaps have manifested nationally and locally as surges in demand around children social care linked to increased rates of contacts, assessment, initial child protection processes, and subsequently flowed through with higher numbers of children and family needing acute support creating pressures on care placements and increasing instability for some of Doncaster's most vulnerable children. An additional national and local factor has been the challenges recruiting an experienced social work qualified and residential workforce to support us to meet need at the right level and offer care and support local to Doncaster.
8. The newly published Working Together 2023, Practice Framework and Kinship care policy are the biggest policy shifts in years and they will have a national, regional, and local impact. The changes shine a light on what we already know here in Doncaster; that being with family is the best environment for children; that we want to work to develop services that ensure wherever it is safe and possible to do so children remain with their families and where and when we have to care we provide the best care and support as local to home as possible.

## **Poverty and its impact on families**

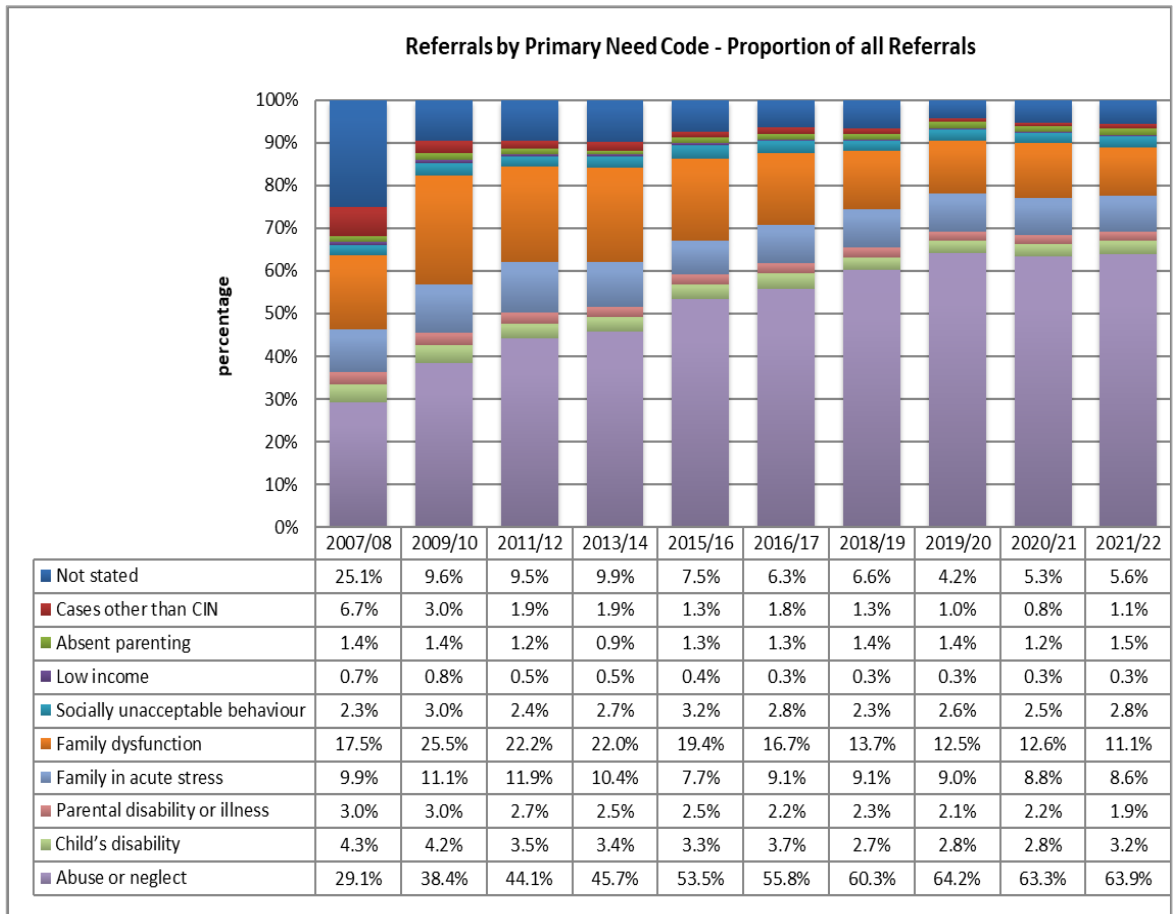
9. As we consider demand and the link with Neglect it is key to understand the impact of poverty. The impact of welfare reforms and the national lack of affordable secure housing are contributing to the increased the numbers of children living in poverty and at risk of adverse childhood experiences. This is a significant determinant of increased demand for early help and social care services. The Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income-deprived families (MHCLG, 2020). The contributory causal link between deprivation, the need for family support, and statutory children's social care interventions is well established. Doncaster ranks 41 in the ranking for deprivation (2019 IMD).
  
10. The Department for Work and Pensions (2022a) report that more than one in five children are living in poverty. In 2020/21, there were 2.92 million children and young people aged 0-19 living in relative low-income households compared to 2.7 million two years ago. 81% of these are under 16 years old. However geographic variations are significant as the proportion of children living in low-income households in individual LAs varies from 3% to 42%. In May 2022, there were 3.6 million UK households with at least one child in claiming universal credit (DWP, 2022b).

## **A national snapshot on demand through the lens of Neglect**

11. The chart below reflects a national picture through the DfE data set linked to assessment and where the presenting need is recognised as Neglect.



12. As the graph indicates there are varying factors that over the years have changed in their prevalence and this is linked to broader and better understanding of the impact that parental factors impact on children. Before instead of naming neglect these were identified as family dysfunction or mental health, drug, or alcohol use. That neglect is being named more shows professionals understand the impact on the child/ren and this is key in supporting and empowering families to understand why Children Social Care (CSC) have to become involved in working to address parental factors as this limits the negative causal impact of Neglect. In 2022, 77% of LA's responding to the safeguarding pressures survey said parental factors, such as parental, health, domestic abuse and substance or alcohol misuse has a high to moderate impact on demand.
  
13. The graph below shows this shift, with an increase in referrals citing abuse of Neglect as the presenting need. The graph also reflects the shift in CSC focusing services on more acute need, with most Local Authorities ensuring there is a clear application of threshold for CSC support.

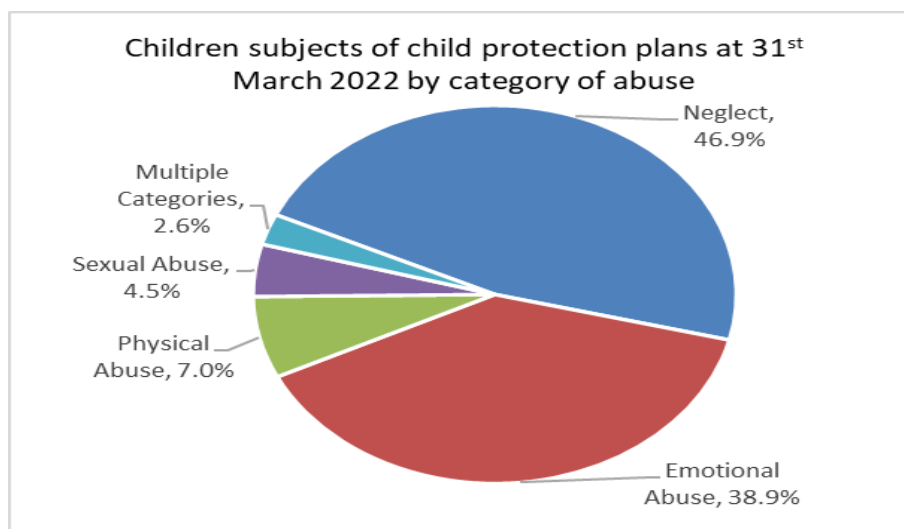


*Referrals by category of need – proportion of all referrals (Source: ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Report Phase 8 2022; respondents, = 117 out of 152 respondents)*

14. The DfE report that the number of Children in need as of 31 March 2023, stood at 403,090 a reduction to 1200 (0.3%) since 2022, however the number of assessments had increased by 1.6%.
15. The DfE report that the Number of children as of 31 March 2023, assessed as being at risk of harm and becoming the subject of a child protection plan stood at 50,780. This was a reduction of 100 (0.3%) since 2022.

## Child Protection plans by category of abuse

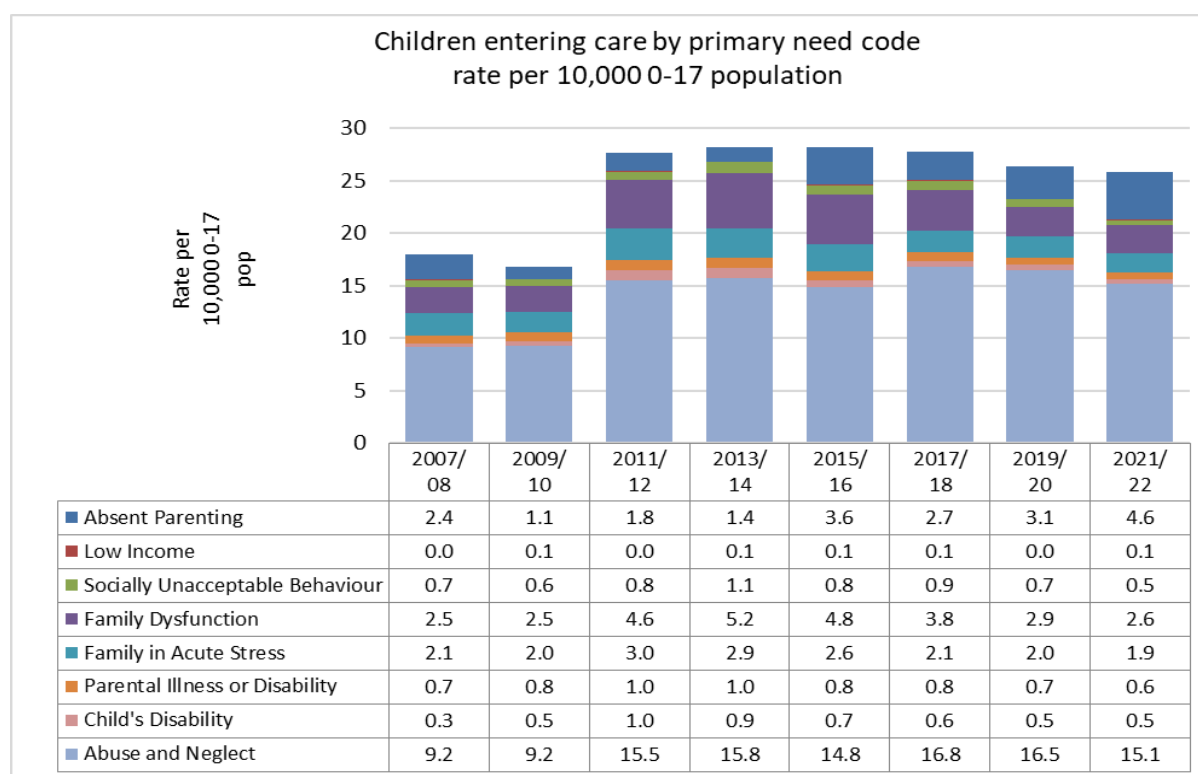
16.



17. The ADCS Safeguarding pressures national report highlighted that from the data shared by a 123 LA's, more children were subject of a child protection plan as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 for neglect (46.9%) than other categories of abuse. Emotional harm predominantly relates to children living in a home where domestic abuse is present and impacting on the emotional needs of these children.

## Category of need for children entering care

18.

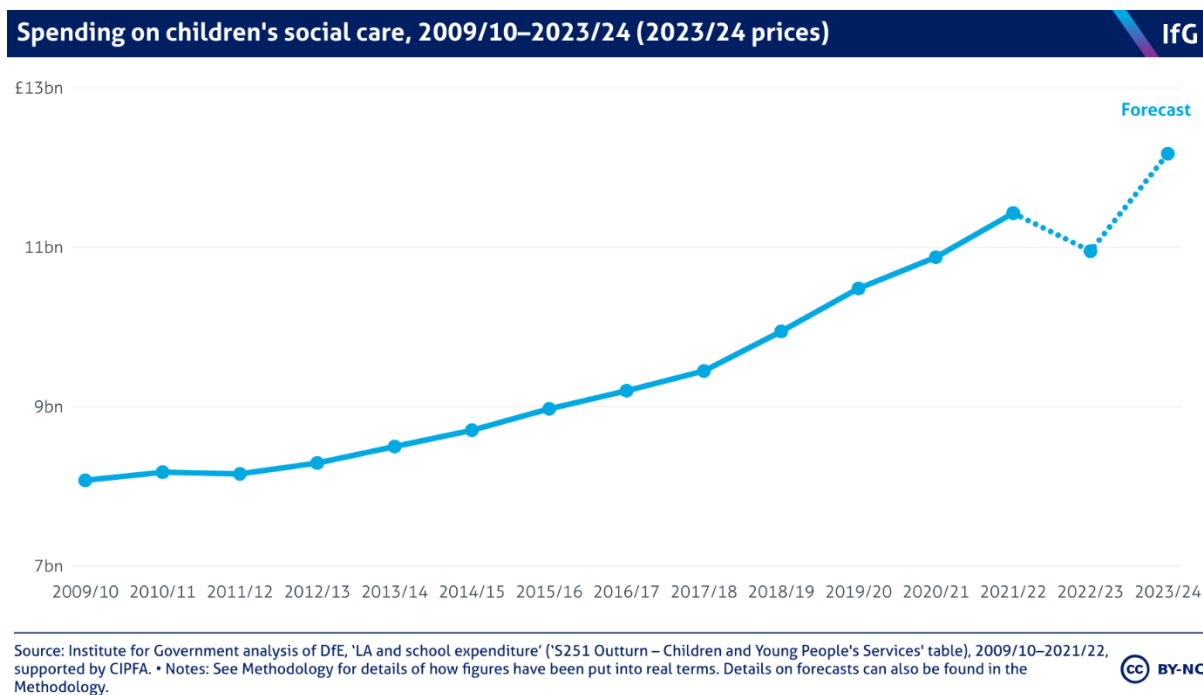


Children entering care by primary need (rate per 10,000 0-17 population)  
(Source: 2021/22 SGP8, 123 respondents)

19. The above reflects the current national picture, themes, and illustrates how demand through the system on a national level. Where there are higher levels of contacts into children social care statutory services, this often leads to greater level of processes including the numbers of assessment, children in need, those subject to child protection, court proceedings and children looked after all then follow.

### National spend on Childrens Social Care 2022/2023

20. The below reflects spending on CSC, with a forecast for 2023/2024 by the Institute for Government.



21. Key to managing demand and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and families in Doncaster, is ensuring the service and partners know the local context well. That there is a shared understanding of what key themes and trends exist locally, how this impacts demand, and how we can use best practice to ensure there is safe decision making, which prevents needs escalating to acute or crisis point.

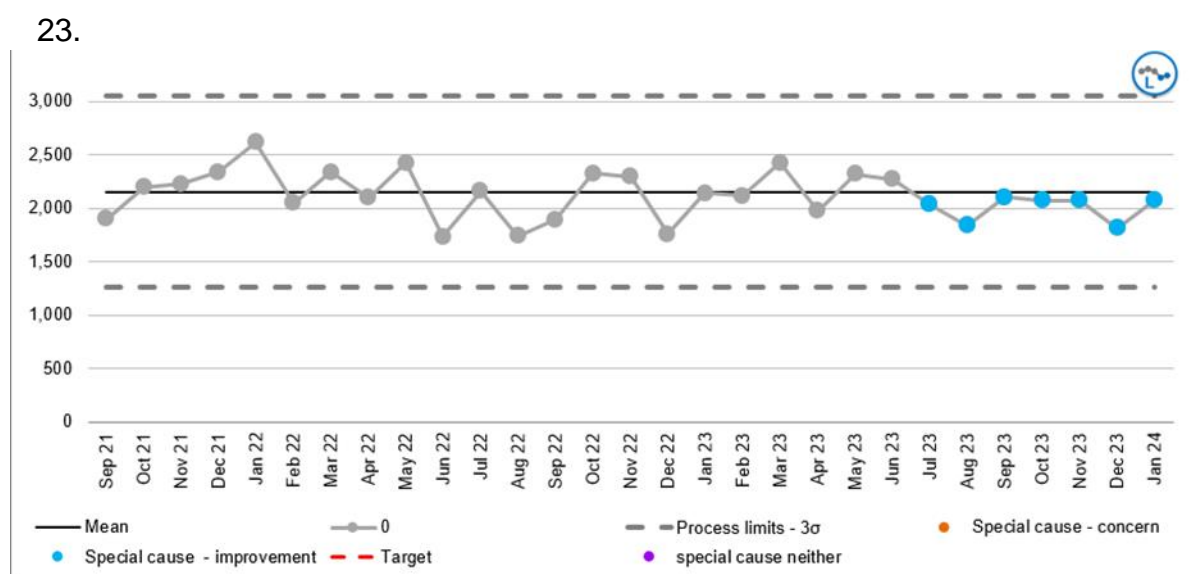
### Local context

22.

- Doncaster's population total is 308,108 and ranks 41 in the ranking for deprivation (2019 IMD).
- 67,070 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Doncaster (2021 Census). This is 21.8% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 22.1% (2021) of the Local Authority's children aged under 16 years are living in absolute low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals (2021/22):
  - in primary schools is 30.1% (the national average is 25.5%)

- in secondary schools is 31.8% (the national average is 26.9%)
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 19.3% of all children living in the area, compared with 36.1% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are White Eastern European, including Gypsy/Roma communities (7.9%).
- The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language (2021/22):
  - in primary schools is 13.2% (the national average is 21.2%)
  - in secondary schools is 10.4% (the national average is 17.4%)
- Children In Need (CIN): the total number of open CIN cases is 2,061.
- Doncaster as at the end of quarter 3 had 332 children with a Child Protection Plan, 558 children are in care and there are 237 Care Leavers

### Doncaster front Door contacts



24. Within Doncaster there is a recognition that the number of contacts to the integrated front door remain high. On average 22.5% convert through to a referral, although there can be variance from month to month and over 92% then convert from referral to assessment. Work is ongoing with key partners to launch an appreciative Inquiry Model at the front door where the focus is on conversations to assess the level of need. The aim is to launch this in May 24, to support a reduction in contacts where there is no further action.

### Assessments

25. The timeliness and quality of assessment continues to improve in Doncaster and a key focus has been how we maximise family support, networks, and the lead practitioner roles, which ensure families can be supported and held within the Early help system instead of pressing through to a more acute response in child in need, child protection or children in care. The number of assessments completed across the year mirror the national trend as we have seen a slight increase on our YTD position for 2023/2024.



## **Children in Need**

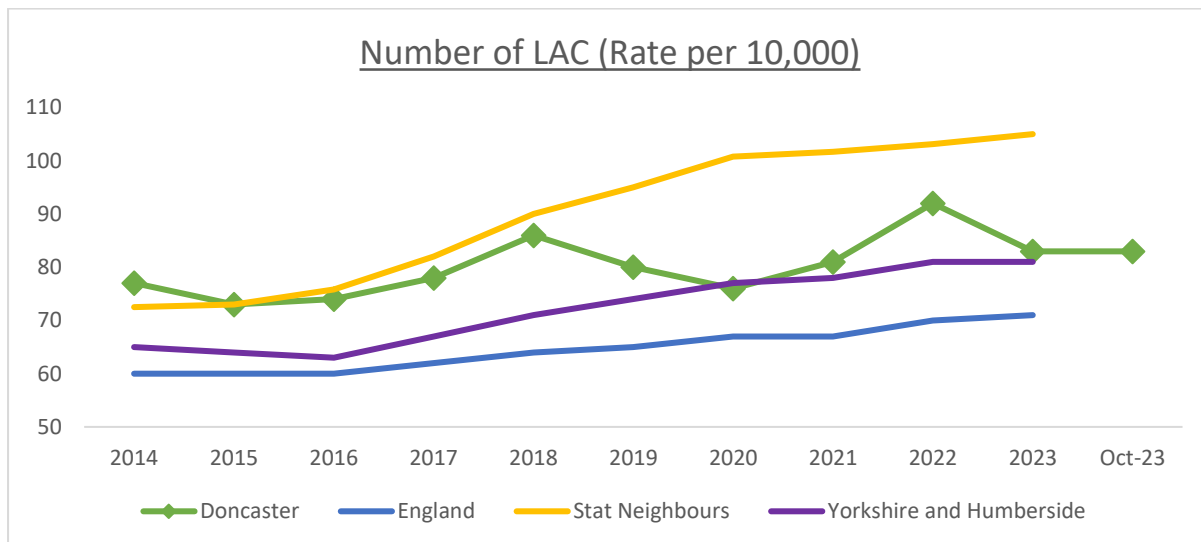
26. The number of children in Need in Doncaster has remained relatively stable over the past year, with most intervention lasting around 6 months. 1% of the CIN work is linked to children with a disability again mirroring the usual trends. The number of re-referrals is an area of increased demand reflecting the families we work with that have complex lives and at times need to return for additional support. It also reflects however the impact of covid on wider partner capacity, with professionals often repeatedly re-referring to CSC to access support, where previously a family lead practitioner would have coordinated support. This is a key area of development for Doncaster as we explore what partner capacity and resources are needed to embed the Family Help model as guided by the new Working Together arrangements to safeguard Children 2023. This work will sit under the DSCP as part of the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA).

## **Child protection processes - S47 and Child protection plans**

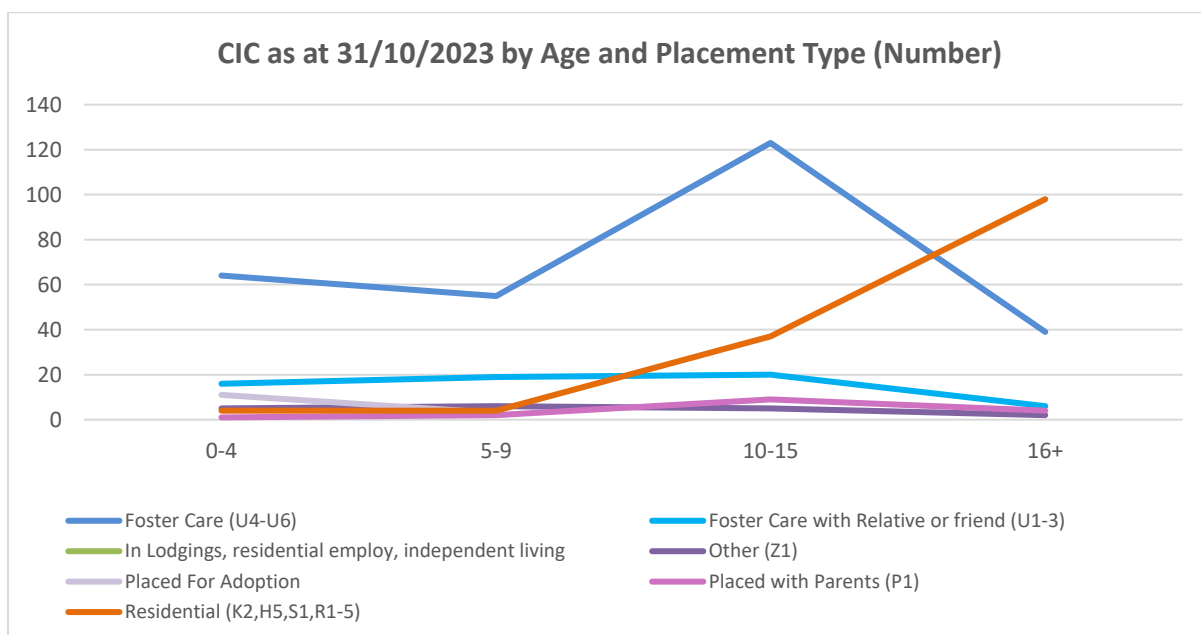
27. Over the past year the number of children subject to early child protection processes such as a strategy discussion or section 47 safeguarding investigation have positively increased. This increase has been linked to a conscious practice change around ensuring that chronic neglect and its significant impact on children and their development is recognised. This in combination with the graded care profile training (a specialist evidence based assessment to identify levels of neglect), ensures that the partnership workforce shares a shared understanding, language, and assessment tool to measure the impact of neglect for children.
28. This means that we remain in line with national and regional figures, which have seen an increase in early CP processes.
29. With regard to children becoming subject to a child protection plan, there is a relatively settled conversion rate from section 47 to a child protection conference. Not all children subject to investigation progress through to a conference, because the whole purpose of the investigation is to measure the level of harm and to work with families and the team around the child to manage risk. Doncaster again sits in line with regional and statistical neighbours. As of January 2024, there were 302 children subject to a CP plan and this was a reduction from last year of 30 children.
30. The trend to note is that the number of children made subject to a plan where the category is neglect. Over the last 6 months 56% of all new plans were under the category of Neglect and out of all children the highest category remains neglect (54%). While it is positive to note that professionals are increasingly recognising and naming neglect, it also highlights the complexity of the harm experienced by children and the services that need to be in place, to safeguard and minimise this harm in the future. In this area of practice, we are focusing in understanding what support networks families have, how we can build these around families to reduce the bounce back into services.

### Children in Care in Doncaster

31. The current national rate of children in care per 10,000 children is 71, an increase from 67 in 2023. When comparing these figures nationally, Blackpool has the highest rate of 191 per 10,000 whilst Merton has the lowest rate at just 26 children per 10,000. The current rate of children in care per 10,000 during the year end to March 2023 in Doncaster was 83 (a decrease from 2022 of 9)



32. Doncaster is performing well in relation to looked after numbers and is coming in line with the region. However nationally and locally, there are some key changes/emerging trends linked to the ages of young people becoming looked after and this means changes to the placement types needed. Given challenges post covid linked to placement availability this means there is a number of children placed in residential and Semi-Independent 16+ setting that would have 3 years ago been placed in a family based/foster caring setting. The below chart reflects the type of placement linked to age.



33. The placement type data shows that foster placements make up the majority of placement for the younger age groups but as the age of the child increases, we see that residential placements take a precedent with 65% of young people age 16+ in residential/semi-independent living placement as of March 2023. In supporting young people through to independence, we are focusing on pathway planning that builds skills and aspiration for the future, ensuring we dynamically assess risk and where safe promote return to family's care.
34. One of the biggest local pressures has been linked to the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) that Doncaster has seen and supported over the past 3 years. This rise has gone from 6/7 per year in 2020 to a peak of 55 in 2023. The DfE (2022a) states that the number of UASC increased by 1,430 (34%) between 2020/21 and 2021/22 and there were 5,570 UASC in care as 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, 10% more than as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Doncaster has the seen this group of young people continue to grow.
35. The Children's commissioner has highlighted on a national level the age profile of children in need continues to shift towards older children. Between 2015 and 2022, the share of children in need who are 16 and over increased from 18% to 25% while the share of children in need who are between ages 1-4 decreased from 20% to 15%. A key factor within this is the impact of contextual safeguarding; the risk of harm that sits outside the family, which for some families is also linked to adolescent neglect.
36. In terms of demand the cost of providing care for those children aged over 11 has increased, as from 11 years upwards and there is a greater challenge finding and sustaining a foster placement. The average cost of an inhouse foster placement is £362 per week vs a weekly average cost of £6,770 for external residential, highlights how demand and the placement market creates significant financial demand.
37. Doncaster has made significant positive progress in reducing high cost external residential placements and has significantly invested in developing inhouse foster carers and Doncaster residential homes. This has meant that we have been able to significantly reduce the overspend, by positively returning children to Doncaster where a number of other LA's are struggling to do so.

## **Workforce**

38. In working to address demand; to get the right intervention and plan for a child and their family at the earliest opportunity is reliant not only having robust systems in place, but having the right work force, supported by a robust and well embedded practice framework.
39. The ongoing investment in Early Help, youth provision and securing of the Family Hubs have been key in meeting the needs of some families earlier, which has reduced demand through to the front door. While there remains further work across the partnership to continue to increase the number of lead practitioners this is an also a positive improving picture.

40. One of the key challenges for Doncaster CSC over the past 3 years has been securing a stable workforce especially across Childrens Social Work and residential care. The below reflects the current CSC recruitment challenge.

	Total	Childrens Social care	Education & Skills	Partnerships & Operations
Staffing No's	1247 (1042.78 FTE)	634 (582.75 FTE)	198 (167.69 FTE)	415 (292.34 FTE)
Vacancies	320	180	47	93

41. For CSC around 40 of the vacancies are children's social workers and there are a further 45 vacancies within residential. Over the past 2 years there has been a heavy reliance on agency staff to ensure caseloads are low and while this addresses the immediate numbers, the quality of work linked to agency has been noted to not always be as consistently good as the permanent workforce. In order to support this, additional training and induction has been agreed for agency staff, alongside significant investment in on boarding social workers in their first year of practice and international recruitment. 14 AYSE have joined the council since September 2023 and in May 24 a further 6 AYSE and 10 experienced international social workers will be starting.
42. The picture linked to recruitment is slowly improving and as a directorate there is an increased focus on embedding Doncaster's Practice framework across the partnership. Through relationships and strengths based practice informed by understanding the lived experience of our families through a trauma based lens, we aim to empower families to care for their children, only intervening to care where we need to.
43. The expectation is that the development for the family help model and practice framework will ensure that thresholds for help and harm are clearly defined and will reduce demand over time.

#### **Budget - Impact of increasing demand and the current picture**

- 44.
- Overall, the Children Services net budget for 2023/24 is £90.4m; projected General Fund overspend this year is £1.34m, mainly relating to Social Care placements and Home to School Transport. This overspend has positively reduced from over £9mil in 2022 as a result of the focus on ensuring care plans and placements are right for the children we care for.
  - Provisional Children Services net budget for 2024/25 is £95.5m, including delivering savings targets of -£3.2m.
  - The Care Ladder projected overspend is £2.73m; includes OOA placements £2.19m, External Accommodation for 16+ Children in Care (Children in care) £1.16m, and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) placements £0.83m, offset by under spends for Fostering -£0.95m, Internal Provision (Residential & Internal Accommodation for 16+ Children in Care) -£1.39m.

45. Over the next 2 months we are expecting to open up 2 sites offering up to 11 semi-independent beds for young people 16+ which will further reduce our reliance on external provision.
46. Acorns a specialist Disability home will open in March 2024 and will be able to care for up to three young people. We also continue to recruit for residential staff.

### OPTIONS CONSIDERED



47. Options are not required for this paper. The request is that the content of the report is noted and the actions identified in the report to safely reduce demand and ensure best value linked to spend across Childrens Social Care are understood.






### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION


48. That the content of the report is noted, and the actions identified in the report to safely reduce demand and ensure best value linked to spend across Childrens Social Care are understood.

### IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

49

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 <b>Tackling Climate Change</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>The activity will predominately take place in families' homes or care settings. However, the focus on supporting more children to be local to Doncaster will support a reduction in travel and the omissions associated to this.</p>				
 <b>Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>The aim of intervention through the Early help and Childrens Social Care Pathway is to raise the aspirations and ambitions of adults, children, and young people. This includes linking them with learning, education, and attainment opportunities through their life course.</p>				

 <b>Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Young people and parents will be linked with learning, education, and attainment opportunities through their life course.</p>				
 <b>Building opportunities for healthier, happier, and longer lives for all</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Children, young people, and their families who access or are referred to Childrens Social Care service have experienced loss and trauma. The aim of the service is to ensure there the right assessment to ensure a bespoke package of support for each individual using a relationship-based trauma informed practice approach.</p>				
 <b>Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>The aim of the service is to reduce need and harm for children and their families in Doncaster communities. The benefit of this means the presenting need in the local communities reduces and individuals feel enabled to be more positively engaged in their community.</p>				
 <b>Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Childrens Social Care works every day to empower families to manage adversity, to connect with services that can reduce need and where needed to ensure that children are protected from harm.</p>				
 <b>Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Children Social Care recognise the benefits and challenges that digital connections create for children and their families. Wherever possible the service aims to support families to use digital resources safely and in a way that positively supports daily life and interaction with services.</p>				

 <b>Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Young people and their families are encouraged to access positive opportunities, recognising the important role this plays in developing their aspirations, ambition, and future citizenship.</p>				
<b>Fair &amp; Inclusive</b>	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Appropriate adaptations will be made to the delivery of Children Social Care activity relating to any specific needs that children or their families may have in order to promote their participation. Doncaster has also recognised Care Experience as a protected characteristic in recognition of the societal barriers being a child in care can bring, with the aim to ensure there is a Doncaster wider commitment to create an equity of opportunity.</p>				

### Legal Implications

50. No Legal Implications have been sought for this report. Further specific advice can be provided to any issues raised by the Panel.

### Financial Implications

51. No Financial Implications have been sought for this report. Further specific advice can be provided to any issues raised by the Panel.

### Human Resources Implications

52. No Human Resources Implications have been sought for this report. Further specific advice can be provided to any issues raised by the Panel.

### Technology Implications

53. No Technology Implications have been sought for this report. Further specific advice can be provided to any issues raised by the Panel.

### RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

54. The risk factors outlined above reflect an emerging national, regional, and local picture linked to pressures that are well understood around demand for acute services and costs linked to acting in only a reactive space. The report reflects

the specific mitigation put in place at each stage of the child and family journey through services, to ensure we respond to need earlier and more effectively, to overtime reduce the level of higher acute need.

55. The specific link with neglect has been highlighted in this report as this remains a key priority for the DSCP and CFEB, and as illustrated has been a key driver linked to increased demand. The cost of living challenges combined with the local Doncaster context means ongoing investment in locality based multi-agency early intervention support is vital to manage current and future demand.

## **CONSULTATION**

56. Consultation around the paper is an ongoing discussion with key partners and the wider council linked to the current demands and activity and the impact of statutory guidance.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

57. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 - [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115121/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2023-statutory-guidance.pdf)
58. DSCP Neglect Strategy - [DSCP Neglect Strategy 2022-24 FINAL - 24.3.22.pdf](#)

## **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

59.

ADCS Association of Directors of Children's Services

CDC City of Doncaster Council

CSC Childrens Social Care

CFEB Children & Families Executive Board

DFE Department for Education

DSCP Doncaster Safeguarding Childrens Partnership

MASA Multi Agency Safeguarding arrangements.

UASC Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

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