



Barnardo's Practitioner Survey

Wave 15

4 July – 14 August 2023

Research and Evaluation Team

Please cite Practitioner Survey by RET when citing findings

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of Wave 15 of Barnardo's Practitioner Survey.

The survey is open to all staff who work directly with children, young people, parents and/or carers. Its purpose is to systematically capture insights directly from Barnardo's practitioners on emerging issues and impacts on children and families, and to capture data to track long-term issues and trends.

The benefit of capturing this data spans into influencing activity with current and future commissioners, parliamentarians, and practitioners; the media profile of the charity; the ability to secure corporate sponsorship and individual giving; learning for internal initiatives; and the ability of the organisation to allocate resources into emerging needs.

The data from the Practitioner Survey is used by a variety of teams including Policy and Public Affairs in briefings to MPs, Media and Fundraising for summer and Christmas campaigns, and Research and Evaluation in research reports.

Key Findings

Consistent Themes

1. Financial Issues, Poverty and the Cost-of-Living Crisis

Practitioners most commonly identify **financial issues**, **poverty** and the **cost-of-living crisis** (35%) as the main issues they are seeing amongst those they support (this has remained consistent since January 2023). They are frequently mentioned in terms of a greater number of families being **unable to afford basic essentials**, such as food, bills or school uniforms, and the increasing **pressure** and **strain** this is causing.

Practitioners think that financial issues, poverty and the cost-of-living crisis are likely to worsen and to continue impacting children, young people and families over the next few years.

The vast majority of practitioners said they are worried that rising costs are impacting the ability of the families they support to afford **food** (93%); **energy** such as heating, fuel, or electricity payments (90%); and **rent or mortgage payments** (80%).

Around two thirds of practitioners (65%) said they are currently supporting a child, young person or family **experiencing poverty** (compared to 58% of practitioners in July 2022). When asked what support around poverty their service provides, these practitioners most commonly said **financial support** (including access to grants, loans or debt relief orders); **access to food**; and **signposting** or **referring** to other services or organisations.

Almost half of practitioners (48%) who said they have noticed changes in the support they need to provide around poverty said their **service has provided increased financial support** over the last year.

2. Mental Health

A rise in **mental health** and **wellbeing** issues amongst children, young people and families continues to be a key concern of practitioners. Mental health issues are frequently mentioned alongside the **cost-of-living crisis**, the **prolonged impact of COVID-19**, and **emotionally based school avoidance**.

The vast majority of practitioners (83%) think there has been an increase in the number of children and young people experiencing **mental health** and **wellbeing** issues in the last 12 months (compared to 87% of practitioners in January 2023).

3. Support and Resources

A **lack of support** and resources is another key concern of practitioners in relation to the children, young people and families they support. A lack of support is often discussed around **long waiting times** and **high thresholds** (particularly mental health support), and a lack of support for children and young people with **additional needs and disabilities**.

New Themes

In January and July 2023, practitioners' concerns about financial issues and poverty have frequently been mentioned in terms of the cost-of-living crisis and the strain this is putting on families, but the impact on **working families** was particularly highlighted in this wave of the survey.

While issues around education have been frequently cited by practitioners across all waves of the survey, in July 2023 specific mentions are made to **emotionally based school avoidance** due to anxiety and the pro-longed impact of the pandemic; a **lack of support**, particularly for children with mental health problems or children with additional needs and disabilities (sometimes resulting in exclusion); and a **lack of school and/or nursery places**.

In January and July 2023, a small proportion of practitioners mentioned a rise in **misogynistic views; transphobia** and anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric; **vaping**; and an increase in young people **questioning their gender identity**.

In July 2023, a small proportion of practitioners mentioned a rise in **harmful sexual behaviour**; young people experiencing **issues with eating** and their body image; **physical health** and a lack of access to GPs and dentists; **Home Office practice** and the rights of asylum seekers; and young people experiencing issues with the **police** and the **Criminal Justice System**.

Emerging and Changing Needs



35% of practitioners said **financial issues and the cost-of-living crisis** are key issues that they are seeing amongst children, young people and families (compared to 43% in January 2023)

24% of practitioners said **an increase in mental health and wellbeing issues** is a key issue that they are seeing amongst children, young people and families (compared to 27% in January 2023)

Are there any new issues you are seeing emerging, or new things you are hearing from children, young people or families, over the last few months? (Open text)

Base: All respondents (638)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---|----------|----------|
| Financial issues/poverty/cost of living crisis | 223 | 35 |
| Increase in MHWB issues among CYP and families (incl. stress) | 151 | 24 |
| Lack of support and resources (incl. waiting times/higher thresholds) | 140 | 22 |
| Education (incl. school refusal/EBSA/exclusion/lack of support/nursery places) | 84 | 13 |
| No change/nothing new | 51 | 8 |
| Increase in housing issues (incl. homelessness) | 39 | 6 |
| Increase in (diagnosis of) ASD & additional needs (incl. SEND) | 38 | 6 |
| Increased impact of digital (incl. gaming, online scams) | 35 | 5 |
| Child development/speech and language delays | 34 | 5 |
| Increase in CYP and families affected by substance misuse (incl. vaping) | 32 | 5 |
| COVID-19 (incl. after effects/longer term impacts) | 23 | 4 |
| Increase in violent/challenging behaviour (incl. knife crime, child on parent violence) | 21 | 3 |
| Harmful sexual behaviour | 14 | 2 |
| Physical health (incl. diet, lack of access to GPs/dentists) | 13 | 2 |
| Isolation | 11 | 2 |
| Increase in bullying | 11 | 2 |
| Staffing pressures (incl. lack of/frequent changes of social workers) | 10 | 2 |
| Boredom/lack of activities for CYP | 10 | 2 |
| Rise in misogyny | 10 | 2 |
| Lack of foster carers/suitable care placements | 9 | 1 |
| Home Office practice/rights of asylum seekers (incl. NRPF) | 9 | 1 |
| Increase in gender identity issues | 8 | 1 |
| Issues worsened/more complex | 8 | 1 |
| Lower self-esteem, less resilience (incl. lower confidence) | 7 | 1 |
| Moving on to adult services | 7 | 1 |
| Issues with eating (incl. body weight/image) | 7 | 1 |
| Family conflict/relationship breakdown (incl. placement breakdown) | 6 | 1 |
| Exploitation (non-specific) | 6 | 1 |
| Police/courts/justice system | 6 | 1 |
| More CYP/F with EAL/lack of translators | 5 | 1 |
| Challenges with joint/partnership working | 5 | 1 |
| Issues with sleep | 5 | 1 |
| More CYP & families affected by domestic abuse | 4 | 1 |
| Transphobia/anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric | 4 | 1 |
| CCE/criminal activity/gang involvement | 4 | 1 |
| Increase in CYP impacted by CSA/E | 4 | 1 |
| Lack of opportunities/access to opportunities | 4 | 1 |
| Job loss/employment prospects | 3 | 0.5 |
| Bias/discrimination/racism | 3 | 0.5 |

| | | |
|--|----|---|
| CYP & families not being listened to/heard | 2 | * |
| Issues around friendship | 2 | * |
| Yes (non-specific) | 2 | * |
| Climate change/environment | 2 | * |
| Other | 32 | 5 |
| Don't know | 1 | * |

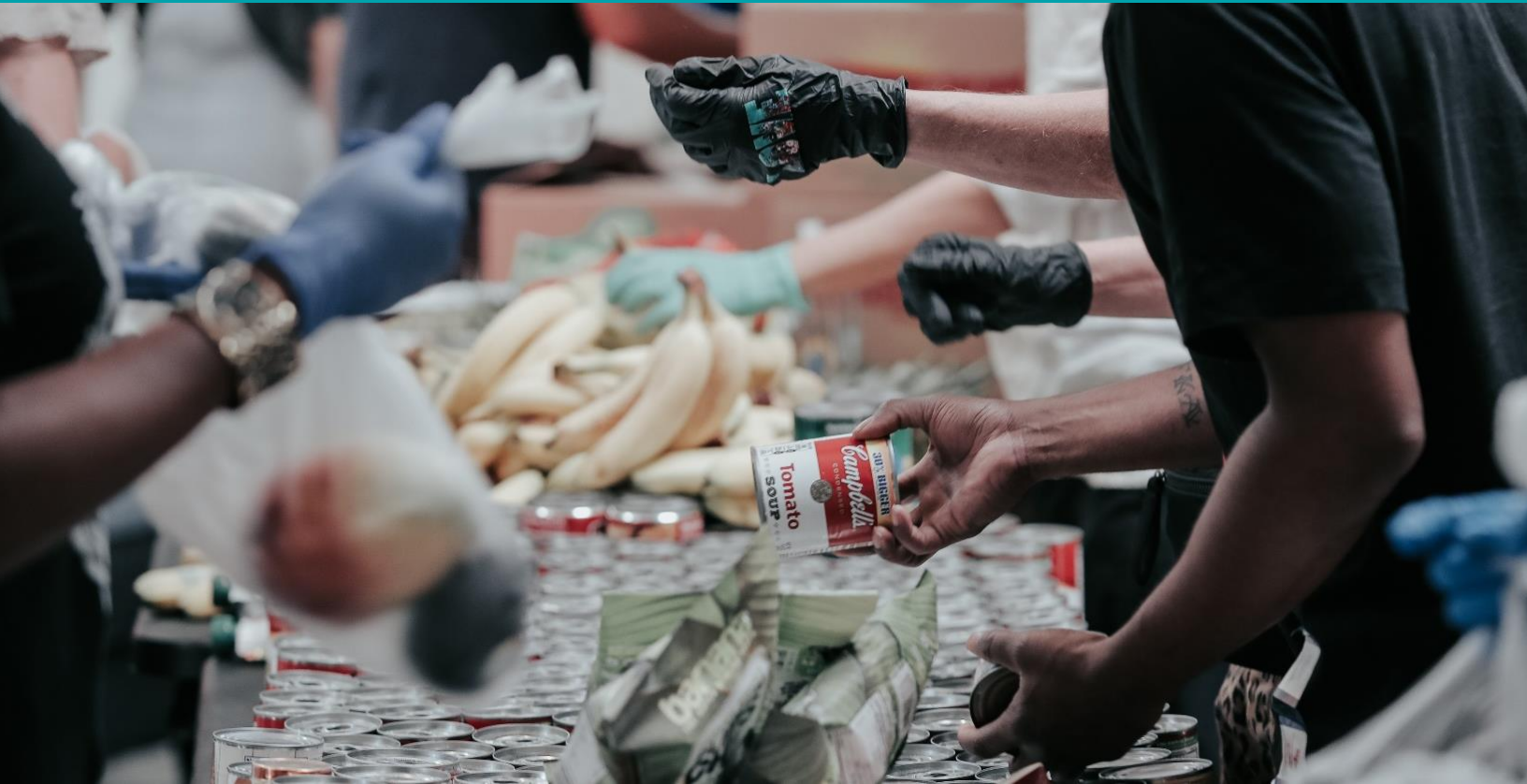
Are there any issues that you think are likely to change or emerge between now and 2027 which will affect children, young people and families? (Open text)

Base: All respondents (567)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---|----------|----------|
| Financial issues/poverty/cost-of-living crisis (incl. inflation/interest rates) | 233 | 41 |
| Rise in MHWB issues | 90 | 16 |
| Housing/homelessness | 53 | 9 |
| Issues with education (incl. attainment, attendance, lack of places/support) | 48 | 8 |
| Lack of MHWB support | 39 | 7 |
| Increased impact of digital (incl. AI) | 34 | 6 |
| Issues in social care sector (incl. lack of staff, budget/funding cuts) | 34 | 6 |
| No/issues will stay the same | 32 | 6 |
| Lack of support (incl. services not adapting to meet changing needs) | 30 | 5 |
| Lack of support for CYP with additional needs (incl. lack of respite care) | 27 | 5 |
| Long term impact of COVID-19 | 24 | 4 |
| Lack of/access to health care (incl. dental) | 15 | 3 |
| Immigration/rights of migrants | 14 | 2 |
| Increase in (diagnosis of) ASD & additional needs (incl. SEN & SPD) | 14 | 2 |
| Poorer health (incl. poor diet/lack of nutrition) | 13 | 2 |
| Increase in violent/challenging behaviour (incl. knife crime) | 12 | 2 |
| Child development (incl. speech/language) | 11 | 2 |
| Substance misuse/addiction | 10 | 2 |
| Yes/issues worsening (non-specific) | 10 | 2 |
| Climate change/climate anxiety | 9 | 2 |
| Gender/identity issues | 9 | 2 |
| Unemployment/lack of job prospects | 9 | 2 |
| Placement moves/lack of care placements (incl. staying put, foster carers) | 9 | 2 |
| Political system/government changes | 8 | 1 |
| Domestic abuse | 7 | 1 |
| Exploitation (non-specific) | 7 | 1 |
| Lack of support for LGBTQI+ CYP | 6 | 1 |
| Lack of activities/unable to afford activities | 6 | 1 |
| Rise in misogyny/violence against women | 6 | 1 |
| Parenting issues | 5 | 1 |
| Social isolation | 5 | 1 |
| Impact of pornographic/inappropriate material | 5 | 1 |
| CCE/criminal activity/gang involvement | 5 | 1 |

| | | |
|--|----|---|
| CSE | 5 | 1 |
| Stress/pressure | 4 | 1 |
| Lack of opportunities/hope for the future | 4 | 1 |
| Lower self-esteem, less resilience | 3 | 1 |
| Child protection/hidden harms (non-specific) | 3 | 1 |
| Family breakdown | 3 | 1 |
| Challenges with joint/partnership working | 3 | 1 |
| Neglect | 3 | 1 |
| Increase in bullying | 2 | * |
| Trauma | 2 | * |
| CYP & families not being listened to/heard | 2 | * |
| Access to open space/outside | 2 | * |
| Other | 37 | 7 |
| Don't know | 17 | 3 |

Poverty



65% of practitioners are supporting children, young people and families experiencing poverty (compared to 58% of practitioners in July 2022)

93% of practitioners are worried that rising costs are impacting the ability of families to afford food

90% of practitioners are worried that rising costs are impacting the ability of families to afford energy (heating, fuel, electricity)

80% of practitioners are worried that rising costs are impacting the ability of families to rent or mortgage payments

Are you currently supporting a child, young person, or family experiencing poverty?

Base: All respondents (773)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|------------|----------|----------|
| Yes | 504 | 65 |
| No | 168 | 22 |
| Don't know | 101 | 13 |

What support around poverty does your service provide? (Open text)

Base: All respondents supporting a child, young person or family experiencing poverty (473)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--|----------|----------|
| Financial support (incl. access to grants/loans, debt relief orders) | 283 | 60 |
| Access to food (foodbanks, vouchers, parcels) | 279 | 59 |
| Signposting/referrals to support | 198 | 42 |
| Barnardo's Cost of living fund | 144 | 30 |
| Financial advice/budgeting support | 94 | 20 |
| Clothing/school uniform | 78 | 16 |
| Access to essential items (e.g. white goods, toiletries, baby equipment) | 75 | 16 |
| Vouchers (non-specific) | 59 | 12 |
| Support with accessing benefits | 57 | 12 |
| Support with bills | 29 | 6 |
| Emotional/wellbeing support | 26 | 5 |
| Free/funded activities (non-specific) | 25 | 5 |
| Family/parent support | 17 | 4 |
| Activities/resources (during school holidays) | 16 | 3 |
| Housing support | 16 | 3 |
| Fuel/travel costs | 15 | 3 |
| Advocacy | 10 | 2 |
| Job/employment support | 9 | 2 |
| Access to warm spaces and warming equipment | 7 | 1 |
| Provide holiday gifts (e.g. Christmas, Easter) | 5 | 1 |
| Cooking lessons/healthy eating | 5 | 1 |
| Liaising with schools | 3 | 1 |
| Funded childcare | 3 | 1 |
| Access to digital equipment (e.g. mobile phones, laptops) | 3 | 1 |
| Access to home safety equipment | 3 | 1 |
| Other | 9 | 2 |
| Don't know | 1 | * |

Over the last year, have you noticed any changes in the support you need to provide?

Base: All respondents supporting a child, young person or family experiencing poverty (483)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------|----------|----------|
| Yes (please specify) | 322 | 67 |
| No | 61 | 13 |
| Don't know | 100 | 21 |

If yes, please specify what changes (open text)

Base: All respondents who have noticed any changes in the support they need to provide (322)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--|----------|----------|
| Increased financial support | 155 | 48 |
| Greater demand for services/more families in need | 74 | 23 |
| Increased support to access food | 58 | 18 |
| Increased mental health and wellbeing support | 46 | 14 |
| Meeting more complex/wider ranging needs | 29 | 9 |
| More intensive/higher level of support | 29 | 9 |
| Increased support to pay bills | 25 | 8 |
| Increased housing support (incl. homelessness) | 20 | 6 |
| Increased parental/whole family support | 20 | 6 |
| Increased support to access essential items | 19 | 6 |
| Increased signposting/referrals to other organisations for support | 17 | 5 |
| Increased support for working families | 15 | 5 |
| Increased support to access clothing | 15 | 5 |
| Less funding/resources available to provide adequate support | 12 | 4 |
| Increased support for additional needs (e.g. SEND, ASD, ADHD) | 11 | 3 |
| Increased support for CYP behaviour | 8 | 2 |
| Support to overcome financial barriers before families can access core service | 7 | 2 |
| Increased support for parental/family conflict | 6 | 2 |
| Increased education, employment and training support | 6 | 2 |
| Increased support with online safety | 3 | 1 |
| Increased support for criminal exploitation/crime | 3 | 1 |
| Increased support for those with EAL (incl. interpreters) | 3 | 1 |
| Increased support for new families (incl. refugees and asylum-seekers) | 3 | 1 |
| Increased safeguarding concerns | 2 | 1 |
| Other | 15 | 5 |

Are you worried that rising costs are impacting the ability of the families that you work with to afford... (Select all that apply)

Base: All respondents (723)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---|----------|----------|
| Food | 669 | 93 |
| Energy (e.g. heating, fuel, electricity) | 648 | 90 |
| Rent/mortgage payments | 575 | 80 |
| Clothing | 564 | 78 |
| Activities for children | 537 | 74 |
| Other essential household items (e.g. appliances) | 441 | 61 |
| Childcare costs | 419 | 58 |
| Beds and/or bedding | 355 | 49 |
| Technology (e.g. mobile phones, internet) | 321 | 44 |
| Health/medicine costs | 268 | 37 |
| Other (please specify) | 79 | 11 |

What impact, if any, is this having on children and young people? (Select all that apply)

Base: All respondents (713)

| | <i>n</i> | % |
|---|----------|----|
| It is harming their mental health and wellbeing | 627 | 88 |
| It is harming their overall development | 496 | 70 |
| It is harming their ability to develop positive relationships | 440 | 62 |
| It is harming their physical health | 400 | 56 |
| It is inhibiting their learning | 390 | 55 |
| It is harming their speech and language development | 231 | 32 |
| Other (please specify) | 54 | 8 |

Mental Health



83% of practitioners think there has been an **increase** in the number of children and young people experiencing **mental health and wellbeing issues** in the last 12 months (compared to 87% in January 2023)

Do you think there has been a change in the number of children and young people experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues in the last twelve months?

Base: All respondents (745)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Increased | 620 | 83 |
| Stayed the same | 2 | * |
| Decreased | 57 | 8 |
| Don't know | 66 | 9 |

Child Sexual Abuse – Mandatory Reporting



29% of practitioners said that a mandatory duty on professionals working with children to report child sexual abuse to either the police or local authority children's care would have an effect on their work or the work of their colleagues

The Government is considering introducing a law which would put a mandatory duty on professionals working with children to report child sexual abuse to either the police or local authority children's care, including if the professional suspects signs and indicators of child sexual abuse are present, otherwise the professional would be held criminally liable.

Would this have any effect on your work or the work of your colleagues?

Base: All respondents (725)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Yes (please specify what effects) | 210 | 29 |
| No | 256 | 35 |
| Don't know | 259 | 36 |

If yes, please specify what effects (open text)

Base: All respondents who think mandatory reporting would effect their work or the work of their colleagues (210)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---|----------|----------|
| Puts additional pressure/stress/anxiety on staff (e.g. criminally liable) | 50 | 24 |
| Staff/services already do report suspected CSA | 40 | 19 |
| Staff would need training/guidance on the requirements | 24 | 11 |
| Would lead to an increase in referrals (incl. associated workload) | 15 | 7 |
| It would increase the number of reports made (incl. false reports) | 15 | 7 |
| It would hinder the ability to build trust with CYP/F | 14 | 7 |
| It would lead to better safeguarding/support | 12 | 6 |
| Yes (non-specific) | 11 | 5 |
| Would make it harder to recruit/retain staff | 8 | 4 |
| CYP/F would need more support | 7 | 3 |
| Would change how reports are made/who they're reported to (e.g. police) | 6 | 3 |
| Improve joint working/information sharing | 5 | 2 |
| Staff would need to be more vigilant | 5 | 2 |
| Needs to focus on perpetrators/prosecuting the abusers | 3 | 1 |
| Other | 34 | 16 |

Have you seen an increase in reporting and referrals of child sexual abuse and exploitation in your local area, over the last few months?

Base: All respondents (722)

| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|------------|----------|----------|
| Yes | 91 | 13 |
| No | 282 | 39 |
| Don't know | 349 | 48 |

Appendix

1. Methodology

- The survey was administered via Survey Monkey, **4 July – 14 August 2023**
- In total, **1,004 practitioners** responded
- Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding or inclusion of multiple responses
- An asterisk (*) represents a value of less than one half of a percent, but not zero; a ‘-’ represents a value of zero
- ‘All respondents’ refers to the total number of respondents who answered a question
- ‘Open text’ refers to questions where respondents provided a response in their own words
- For any queries about the survey or the data presented in this document, or to request any further breakdowns of data, please contact laura.parkes@barnardos.org.uk or sohila.sawhney@barnardos.org.uk

2. Abbreviations Used

| | |
|---------|---|
| ADHD | Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder |
| AI | Artificial intelligence |
| ASD | Autism Spectrum Disorder |
| CCE | Child criminal exploitation |
| CSA | Child sexual abuse |
| CSE | Child sexual exploitation |
| CYP | Children and young people |
| CYP/F | Children, young people and families |
| EAL | English as an additional language |
| EBSA | Emotionally Based School Avoidance |
| LGBTQI+ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex + |
| MHWB | Mental health and wellbeing |
| NRPF | No Recourse to Public Funds |
| SEN | Special educational needs |
| SEND | Special educational needs and disabilities |
| SPD | Sensory Processing Disorder |

3. Sample Overview

Service users supported

Base: All respondents (1,004)

| | <i>n</i> | % |
|------------------------------|----------|----|
| Children and/or young people | 293 | 29 |
| Parents/carers | 99 | 10 |
| Both | 612 | 61 |

Region/nation worked in

Base: All respondents (908)

| | <i>n</i> | % |
|------------------------|----------|----|
| Cymru | 55 | 6 |
| England - North | 216 | 24 |
| England - Central | 111 | 12 |
| England - South West | 124 | 14 |
| England - South East | 166 | 18 |
| England - London | 61 | 7 |
| Northern Ireland | 85 | 9 |
| Scotland | 83 | 9 |
| Other (please specify) | 7 | 1 |

Service type

Base: All respondents (908)

| | <i>n</i> | % |
|---|----------|----|
| Youth Work (including Youth Justice) | 12 | 1 |
| Employment, Training and Skills (ETS) | 18 | 2 |
| Care Leavers/Accommodation Support | 54 | 6 |
| Advocacy, Children's Rights and Participation | 40 | 4 |
| Refugee and Asylum Seekers | 23 | 3 |
| Child Protection (e.g. Domestic Abuse) | 21 | 2 |
| Child Abuse and Exploitation (e.g. Child sexual exploitation (CSE), Missing, Trafficking, harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)) | 44 | 5 |
| Looked After Children (e.g. Family Placement, Residential Care) | 67 | 7 |
| Education | 45 | 5 |
| Disability/Health | 65 | 7 |
| Mental Health | 96 | 11 |
| Family Support Services (e.g. children affected by parental imprisonment (CAPI), Young Carers) | 125 | 14 |
| Early Support (e.g. Children's Centres, Parenting Programmes) | 283 | 31 |
| Other (please specify) | 15 | 2 |