

Family support on the edge of care in an era of rising care rates

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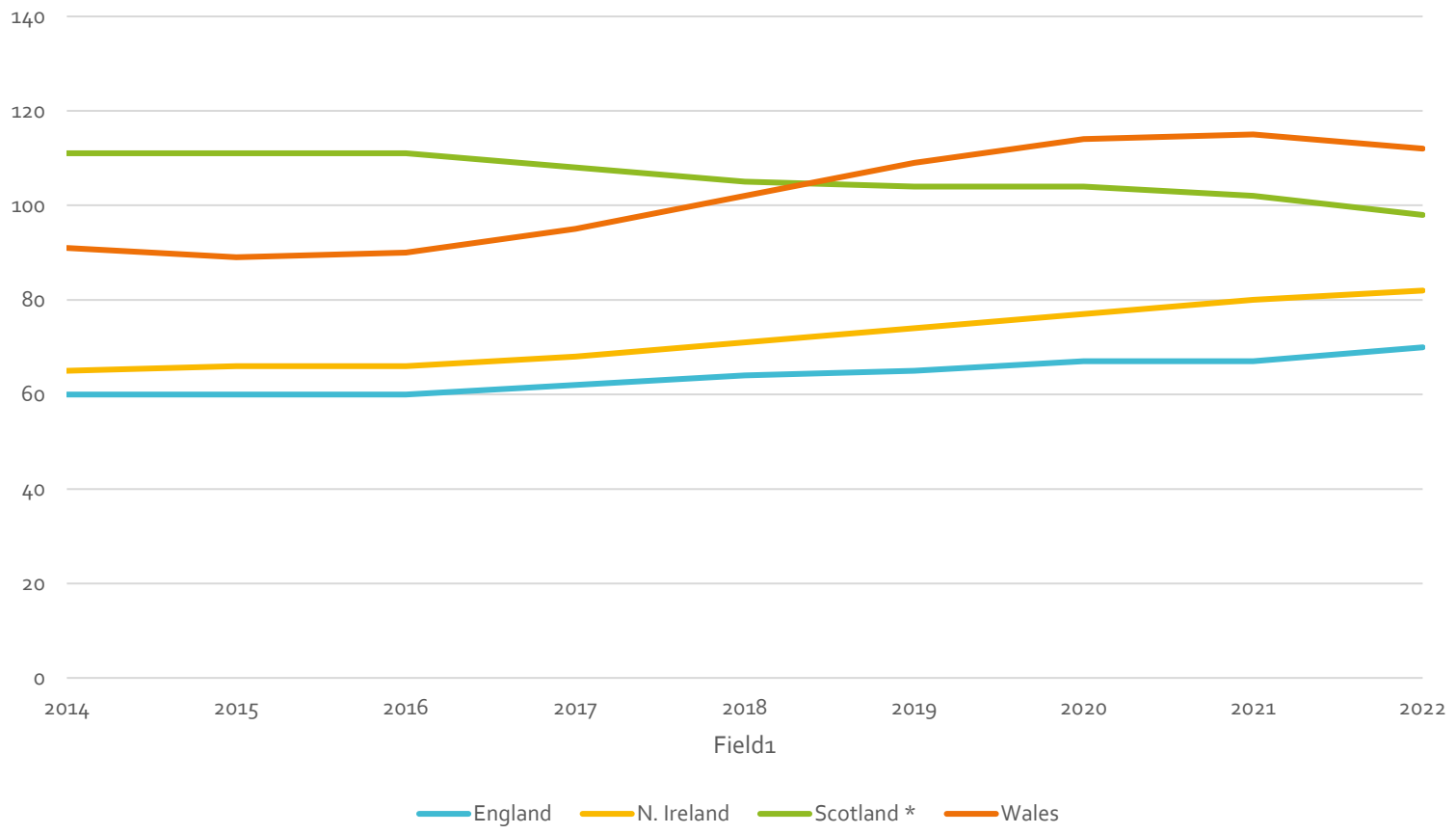
Contents

- Hollowing out of family support in England/UK over the last 14 years
- Issue of lack of adequate housing where children are on the edge of care
- Conclude by looking forward to restoring a more family supportive children's services system



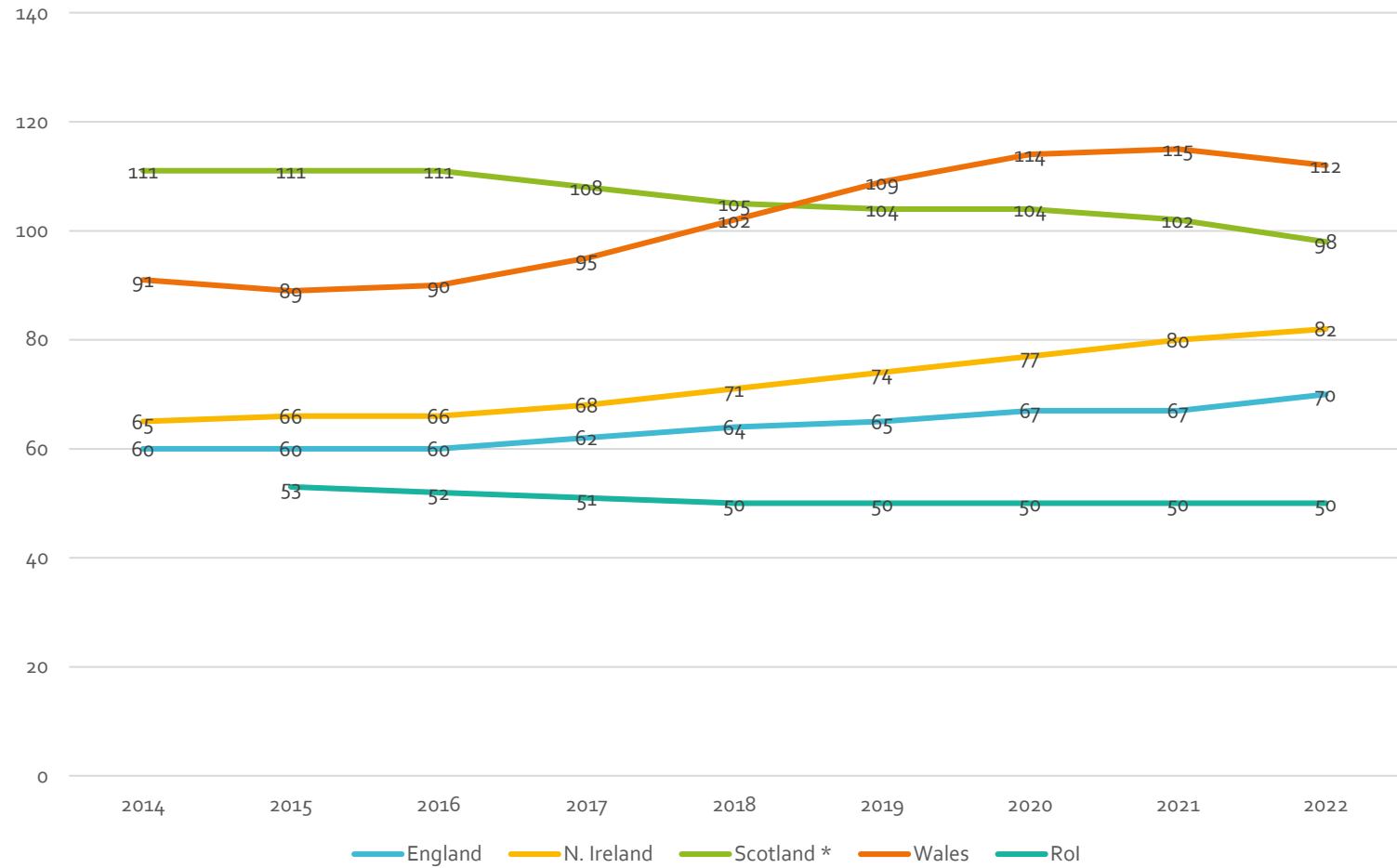
An era of rising care rates....

Care Rates / 10,000 Children UK (Hayes et al.)

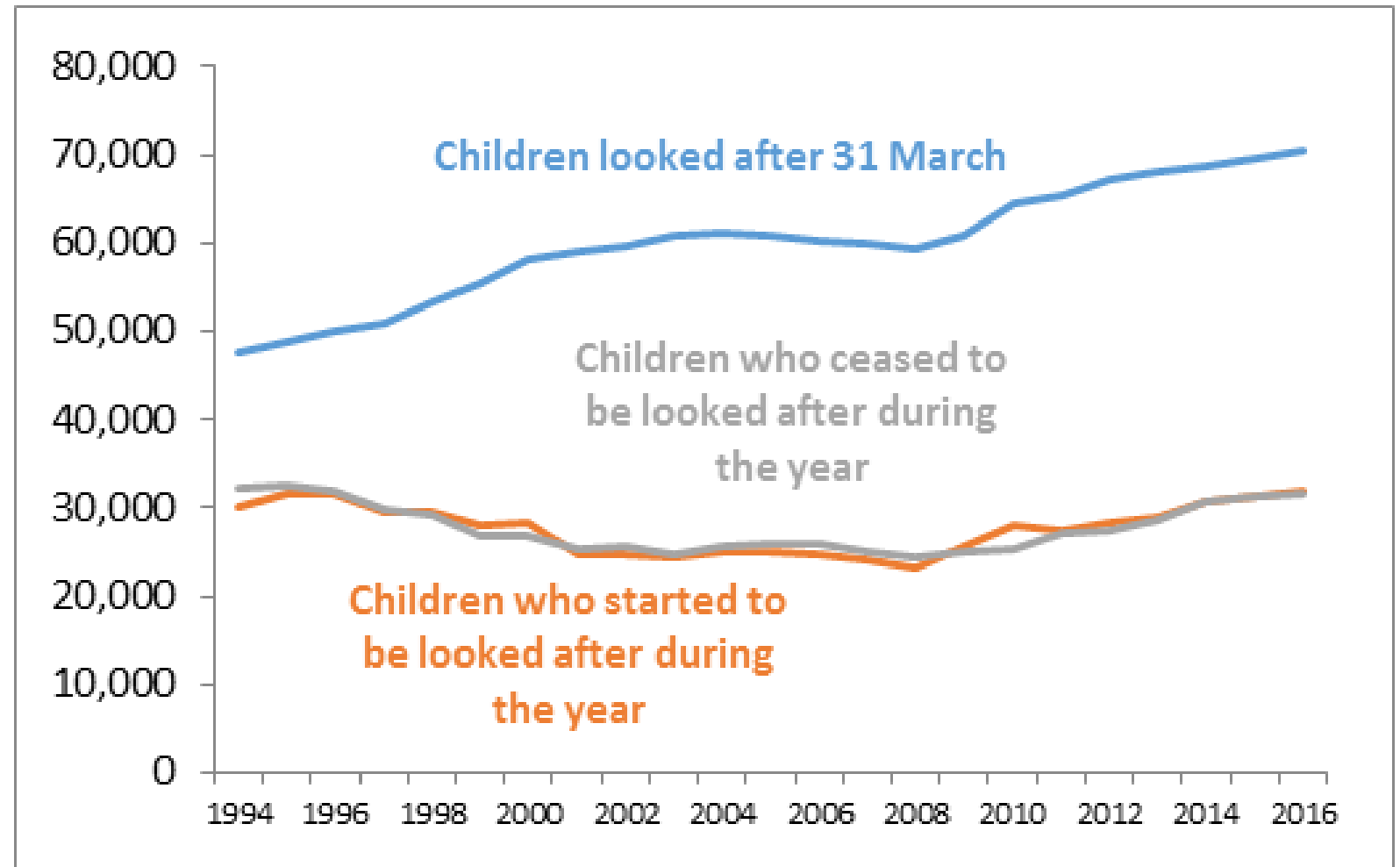


Except in
Ireland.....

Care Rates / 10,000 Children UK and RoI



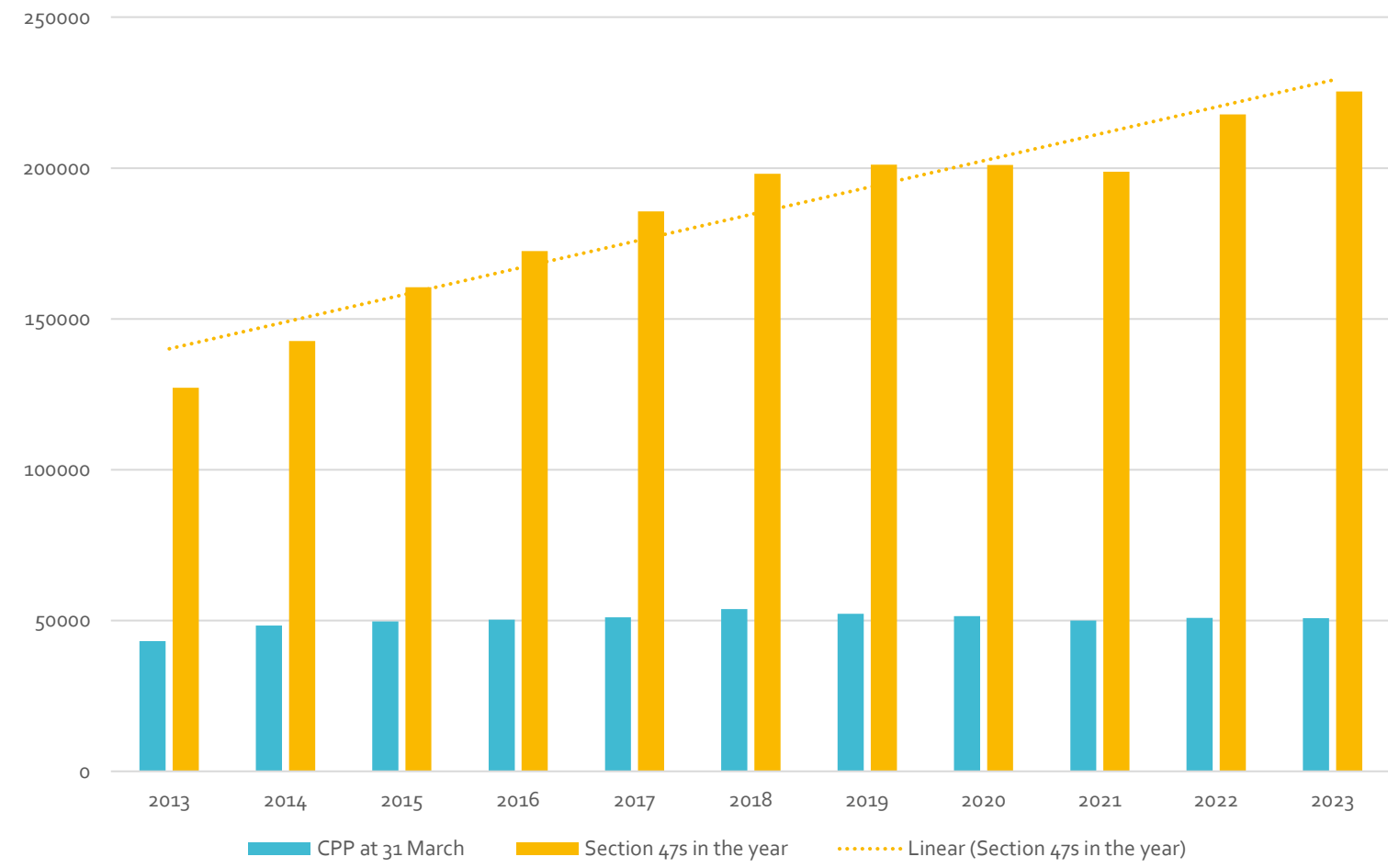
England care numbers





S.47s & CPPs in England 2013 - 2023

CPP and S.47 Inquiries England

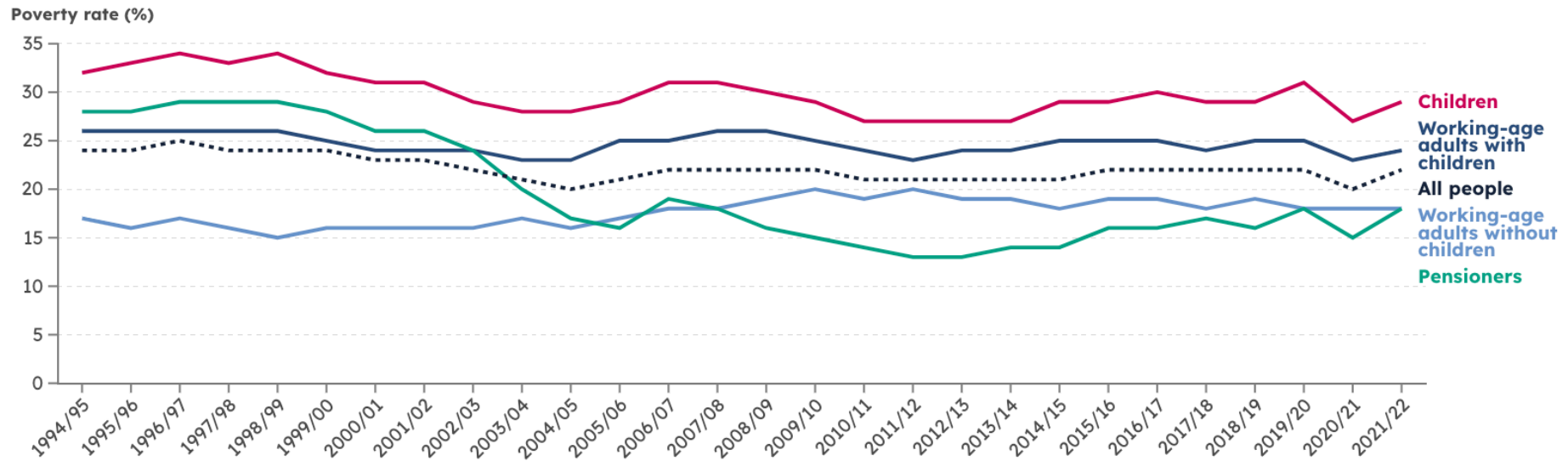


Study of intensive family support service north of England 2013-14

- Richard: We'd just moved in, there were no carpets on the floor, there were no settee. And within a couple of weeks, I've got a carpet down and things.
- Sally: That table.
- R: New table, new settee. I've got carpet in here.
- S: And he [the social worker] just says, 'Things haven't changed, have they?'
- R: . . . He didn't walk in and notice that we'd actually done anything.

(Sen, 2015)

- Strengths based & task focussed, empathic, whole family approach, mixture of practical, material affective, psychological input, generic family support with access to specialist services (e.g. MH, Drug and Alcohol when needed)
- Existed alongside C&F SW but worked in unison with it
- Provided needed and desired support despite negative policy framings of families under the coalition government 2010 onwards
- But more evidence of softer outcomes than harder; evident that some families who kept care of their children would still need LT support



Source: Households Below Average Income, 2021/22, DWP

A Flourish chart

Poverty in the UK (source JRF)



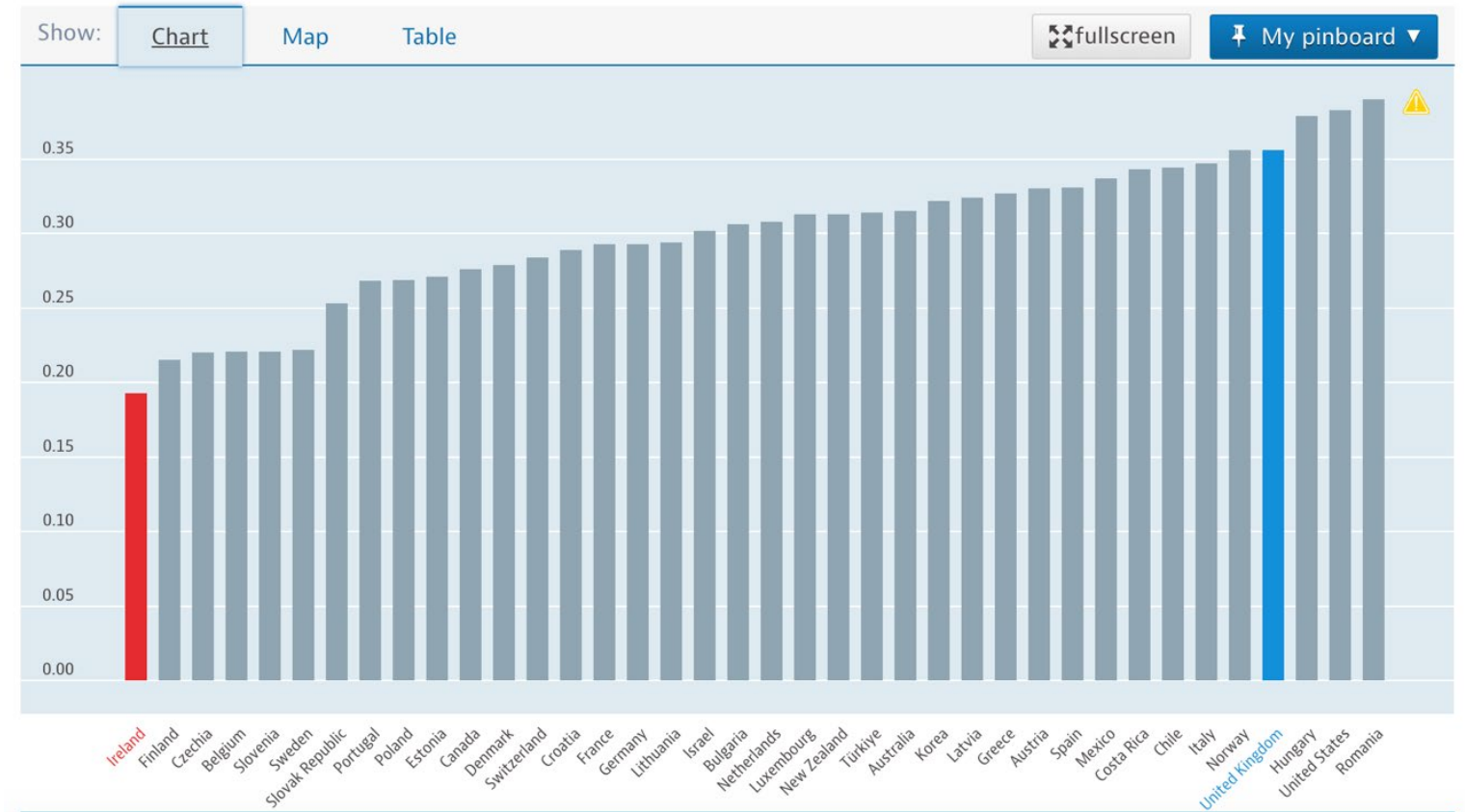
The denial of the impact of poverty: Gove (2013)

- Social workers overly influenced by this analysis not only rob families of a proper sense of responsibility, they also abdicate their own. **They see their job as securing the family's access to services provided by others, rather than helping them to change their own approach to life.** Instead of working with individuals to get them to recognise harmful patterns of behaviour, and improve their own lives, some social workers acquiesce in or make excuses for these wrong choices.
- But 10% most deprived neighbourhoods x12 likely to see children enter state care than the 10% least deprived (Bywaters et al., 2020)
- Child poverty did make a difference: estimate that 8.1% (10,000) children 2015-20 entered care were due to rise in child poverty 2015 and 2020 (Bennett et al., 2020)



Poverty gap Total, Ratio, 2022 or latest available

Source: Income distribution





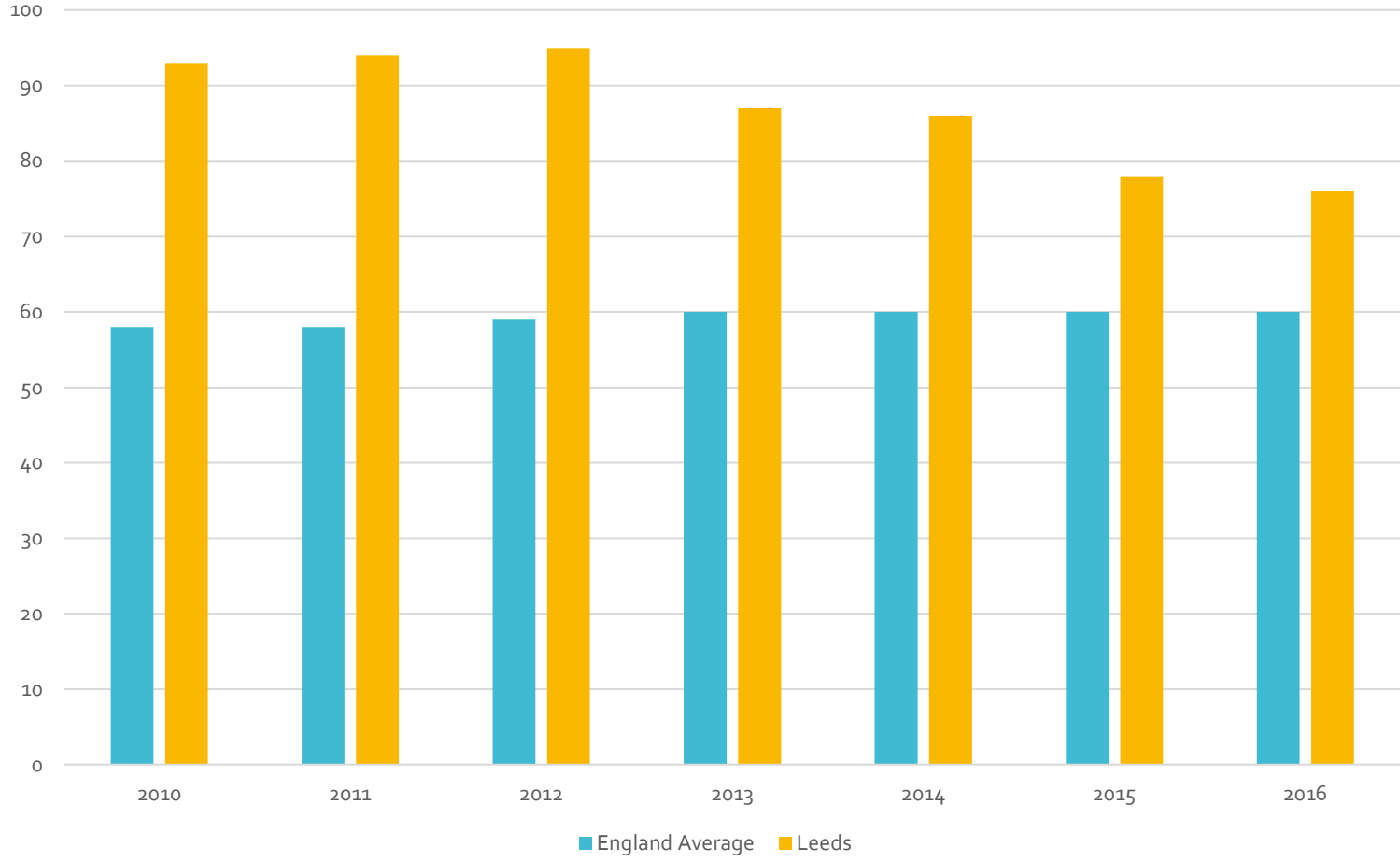
Austerity – service cuts *and* poverty

- Planned 30% budget cuts to LA budgets early years Lib Dem Conservative coalition
- Hit poorer areas harder due to change in funding formulas
- Punitive welfare changes: Bedroom tax; 2 child limit; Universal Credit roll out. Effect of making poorer families wary of welfare state.
- Spending on children's services :
 - Early intervention services decreased from 2010 by 46% in 12 years (Franklin et al., n.d.),
 - 60% cuts in preventative services estimated 2010 - 20 (Kelly et al., 2018):
 - These were likely disproportionately family centres, youth groups, youth centres, community centres



Leeds Family
Valued (see
Sen and Webb,
2019)

CLA rates Leeds and England Average





Housing as an issue in entry in out of home care: The Problem

- Lack of affordable, quality housing in the UK
- Shrinkage of social housing provision and rise of private sector housing; increased need for housing – Covid, population rises; increasing rents
- An issue throughout Europe, including Ireland (e.g. Haran and Ó Siochrú (2018); Hearne and Murphy, 2018)
- In England gap between benign legislation and policy on housing for families and practice :
 - 'Priority need' vs and realities of gatekeeping
 - Net result large numbers of families dependent children in temporary accommodation
- Impact of homelessness: family functioning, psychological well-being; education, stability
- Impacts of poor quality housing: child and family health;



The lack of connection housing and social work

- Silos housing and social work in research, practice and policy: Have been specialist joint projects: (Hill et al. 2002; Anderson et al. 2006)
- Two distinct groups of families with experience of homelessness whom CFSWs could come into contact with:
 - Families who had CFSW for other reasons and for whom housing also an issue - reasons connected to homelessness: domestic violence, relationship breakdown, neighbourhood harassment and poor housing conditions
 - Wider difficulties: including relationship breakdown, addiction, finance management difficulties and debt
 - Migrant families subject to No Recourse to Public Funds



Survey SWs (n=38)

- Illustrated housing an issue but a major factor (42%) and contributory factor (58%) children's entry to care for families in practice experience of these CFSWs
- Reasons for family homeless were complex interplay of factors and not just housing but reinforced each other
- SWs tended to see supporting families to access housing as more of a housing officer role but got involved if needed to
- Reported some good relationships housing providers (mainly LAs) but there were more issues when families not accepted as meeting criteria for re-housing
- Frustrations re NRPF policy, but also some misunderstandings of s.17 support.

Issues with housing support for families

- "Our council housing service are usually willing to bend rules to help families to not be homeless. The help is far worse (highly inadequate) in relation to moving families who are at risk due to domestic abuse or CCE [Child Criminal Exploitation], doing repairs for families who have breached their tenancy in some way (even where not doing that is impacting on the children's health but it's the parents' fault), and parents being made homeless after their children have been removed by social care. All those areas are very common concerns and are a big problem." (SW)
- "Families can be found intentionally homeless for refusing properties in areas where they fear experiencing harassment, including racial harassment/hate crimes. This needs to be challenged and addressed as a cause of homelessness." (SW)
- "Often I see mothers (and fathers) who have fled DV being placed in inadequate temporary accommodation, with isolation and lack of facilities adding to the stress & trauma they have already experienced. This can contribute to the inadequate parenting for the child. Housing can be impossible to work with in addressing these issues." (SW)



Workers should let families know re housing needs entitlements and max out support they can from their own LA for family's housing needs


Training needed for SCFSWs/FSWs on families' legal rights to support

Relationships with housing providers key on what is and is not possible

Ban no fault evictions in private tenancies

Recording where housing needs are unmet and especially where an issue on children's entry into care

Ways forward



'Principal reason' entry into care, England DfE 2023

Principal Reason	%
Abuse or neglect	65
Family dysfunction	13
Family in acute stress	7
Absent parenting	7
Parent's illness or disability	2
Child's disability	2
Socially unacceptable behaviour	1
Low income	0



Conclusion: Family support – is Everyone's Responsibility

- Investment in family support is needed: practice and practice leadership are important but cannot be a substitute for reducing (child) poverty and funding services properly
- Investment in family support matters – for keeping families together; for preventing more serious problems developing; and so that money is invested in helping families rather channelling profits to large global financial firms through care placement provision
- Need from heavily risk assessment procedural model in UK practice: need to distinguish between necessary and unnecessary bureaucracy
- That policy, and policy restrictions are important but example of housing shows there are things practitioners can do to help families using legal mandates they have
- Child protection activity is family support and not a separate activity

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