Press Release - Thousands of vulnerable children being put in harm’s way by public institutions

Tasers used on hundreds; thousands housed in unsafe homeless accommodation; hundreds of thousands denied timely treatment for mental illness

Some of England’s most vulnerable children are being needlessly put in harm’s way because their safety and wellbeing is ignored whilst the Government is focused on Brexit. So says State of Children’s Rights 2017, a new report from the Children’s Rights Alliance for England, which has found that the Government is not doing enough to stop young children being:

* subjected to the use of Tasers and spit-hoods by the police or locked up alone in police cells for days on end
* forced to spend months living in squalid and overcrowded homeless accommodation that has not been vetted to make sure it is a safe place for children
* denied timely access to desperately-needed local mental health care when they reach emotional crisis point

The charity says thousands of England’s most vulnerable children are experiencing dangerous situations whilst political leaders look the other way.

Louise King, Director of the Children’s Rights Alliance says:

*“Due to Brexit, the political focus is dominated by trade, the economy and our negotiations with the EU. Meanwhile little or no attention is being paid to some of the huge danger experienced by struggling families and ill-protected children who are being failed by our public institutions. Government should ensure that Ministers have a legal obligation to consider how their decisions will affect children.”*

The report finds that whilst the number of under-18s being arrested has dropped by more than half in the last six years, the use of hooding, Tasers, stop-and-searches and police-cell detentions, on children under 18 in England is increasing sharply.

* Tasers are still being used on hundreds of children in England with at least 519 uses in 2016 (an increase of 25% from 2013). Last year, Tasers were discharged or fired in 42 of these uses and the youngest child fired on with a Taser was just twelve years old. (The UN Committee against Torture has said the use of Tasers on children should be banned.)
* Twenty out of the 40 police forces in England currently use spit-hoods. Fifteen forces provided data indicating that spit-hood use on children is rising. They were used on at least 68 children in the first nine months of 2017 - including a ten-year-old boy - compared to at least 27 in 2016 and twelve in 2015.  Risk assessments drawn up by police forces reference the dangers of “breathing restriction and asphyxia” posed to people wearing them. The Independent Police Complaints Commission has investigated the deaths of several adults following the use of spit hoods.
* Thirty-three police forces in England admitted that between them they held, at least 22,408 children – including more than forty 10 and 11 year-olds -overnight in police cells during the course of 2016. One child was detained for nearly five days. More than a third (36%) of children, detained overnight in police cells were children from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. In London BAME children accounted for nearly two-thirds (64%) of the 8,275 children detained overnight.

The study documents a rise in the number of children in homeless families whose health and wellbeing is put at risk by living in temporary accommodation that has frequently not been inspected and certificated as safe places for young children to reside.

* Local authorities are not fulfilling their safeguarding duties and inspections are being carried out infrequently. Almost a third of 200+ local authorities, that responded to the charity’s FOI requests, do not have a safeguarding policy that applies when transferring children from local authority accommodation to private rental temporary accommodation. Over half said they did not have one for transferring children to local authority temporary accommodation or B&Bs.
* Meanwhile there has been a 60% increase in the number of families with children living in temporary homeless accommodation since 2010. And by the end of June this year 2,710 families with dependent or expected children were living in B&B accommodation, nearly four times more than in 2010 (740). Over a third of families (1,200) were living there for more than six weeks, which is against the law.

Eighteen year-old Fowzia, who lived in a B&B for six months said:

*“The B&B was horrible. There were no cooking facilities or fridge so we had no choice but to buy fast food and my mum was getting very little benefits. We had to all live in two small rooms. It was really squashed and my disabled brother had to share a bed with my mum. It was cold and dirty and when we complained, no one helped us or ever came to inspect it. At one point, someone broke into our room which scared us all."*

The charity’s analysis revealed that despite the significant ongoing investment in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) this increased funding is still not reaching the frontline. Access and waiting times continue to be a postcode lottery whilst rates of suicide and self-harm amongst children have increased at alarming rates.

* In 2016, nearly 3% of 5-17 year olds (200,000 children) received specialist mental health treatment.
* The Care Quality Commission (CQC) found CAHMS waiting times of between 35 days to 18 months in different areas.
* Seven out of 10 children with severe mental health problems were admitted to hospitals outside of their local areas in 2016- 2017, an increase of 57% from the previous year placing them far away from their family, friends and local services at a time when they are the most vulnerable.
* Over a quarter of children referred to specialist mental health services are not accepted for treatment, most often because they do not meet the eligibility criteria for specialist CAMHS.

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Statistics have been sourced from various official bodies via Freedom of Information (FoI) requests and from published information.  Sources are available on request and the fully referenced report is available [here](http://www.crae.org.uk/publications-resources/state-of-childrens-rights-in-england-2017/).