

Wirral JSNA: Children & Young People: Child Protection and Children Looked After

Summary

- The rate of referral to children’s social care fell between 2009 and 2014, but the proportion of referrals that result in initial and core assessments increased over the same period.
- In 2014, Wirral had a higher proportion of children assessed as being in need (396 per 10,000 population under 18) than the national rate (346 per 10,000). Of these the initial category of need was highest due to Family dysfunction (39.1%) followed by neglect (32.2%) at initial assessment.
- The rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan increased between 2008 and 2014 to 58 per 10,000 (higher than the England average of 52 per 10,000). The main reasons for children becoming subject to a child protection plan were neglect (38.8%) and physical abuse (38%).
- As at 31st March 2014 Wirral has a higher number of children in care (99 per 10,000 population) compared to the national figure (60 per 10,000 population, 31st March 2014).

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Child Protection and Looked After Children

The definition of a child in need is defined by Section 17(10), [Children Act 1989](#) as:

- He/she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority.
- His/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired without the provision for him/her of such services.
- He/she is disabled.

The Act further states that 'development' means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development and 'health' means physical and mental health.

Whilst Children in Need of support and protection are the responsibility of all agencies in Wirral who work with children under the Children Act 1989 and [Children Act 2004](#) with each agency delivering different elements of service to meet the needs of children, young people and families, the Local Authority children's social care has the lead responsibility for the assessment of children in need.

A review of the effectiveness of the current system for child protection was commissioned by the government and undertaken by Professor Eileen Munro.

["The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report A child-centred system"](#), Department for Education May 2011. The Munro report recommended a greater emphasis on early help for children, the removal of unnecessary or unhelpful prescription and a focus on essential rules for effective multi-agency working and on the principles that underpin good practice.

Children and young people were asked [their views about child protection](#) procedures as part of the Munro review nationally and the most important for them was: their social worker; the importance of knowing what is happening; being able to have a say at meetings and visits; getting decisions right; being able to trust social workers and concerns about the child protection process.

According to the [Children in Need Census Guidance](#) for the annual Children in Need Census, 'Children in Need' (CIN) are all children who are referred to children's social care services even if no further action is taken. This includes children looked after (CLA), those supported in their families or independently, and children who are the subject of a child protection plan.

The process for referral and assessment for services is measured at various stages. There is the initial contact with children's social care which may or may not lead to a referral. When a referral is accepted, this will usually be followed by a Single Assessment, in Wirral these are called a [Social Work Assessment of Needs](#) (SWAN) and may take up to 45 working days to complete dependent upon the complexity involved. The purpose of the assessment is:-

- to gather important information about a child and family;
- to analyse their needs and/or the nature and level of any risk and harm being suffered by the child;
- to decide whether the child is a child in need (Section 17, of the Children's Act) and/or is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm (Section 47, of the Children's Act); and
- to provide support to address those needs to improve the child's outcomes to make them safe.

Assessments are completed in line with the [Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families](#) and from 21st March 2013, according to the revised [Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance in 2013](#)

Prior to April 2014 Wirral used the previous national assessment framework consisting of an initial assessment, that may be undertaken following referral, normally completed within 10 working days. If a further assessment was required a core assessment would be undertaken, normally completed within 35 working days. Within this chapter figures are provided for initial and core assessments as SWAN data will only be submitted after April 2015.

Wirral has [levels and thresholds](#) of need, agreed by the Wirral Safeguarding Children’s Board (WSCB), that define the criteria for accessing preventative and protective services. Children in Need have the universal needs of all children and more complex additional needs than those requiring a Common Assessment under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The Common Assessment Framework is an early help inter-agency assessment. It offers a basis for early identification of children's additional needs, the sharing of this information between organisations and the coordination of service provision. Early help assessments should identify what help the child and family require to prevent needs escalating to a point where intervention would be needed via a statutory assessment under the Children Act 1989.

The rate of children in need, referral rates, single assessment (initial assessment, core assessment), section 47 enquiry, children subject to child protection plan and the number of children looked after provides evidence of the particular needs of the most vulnerable children in Wirral and those who are at most risk.

[Level of need \(Children in Need\)](#)

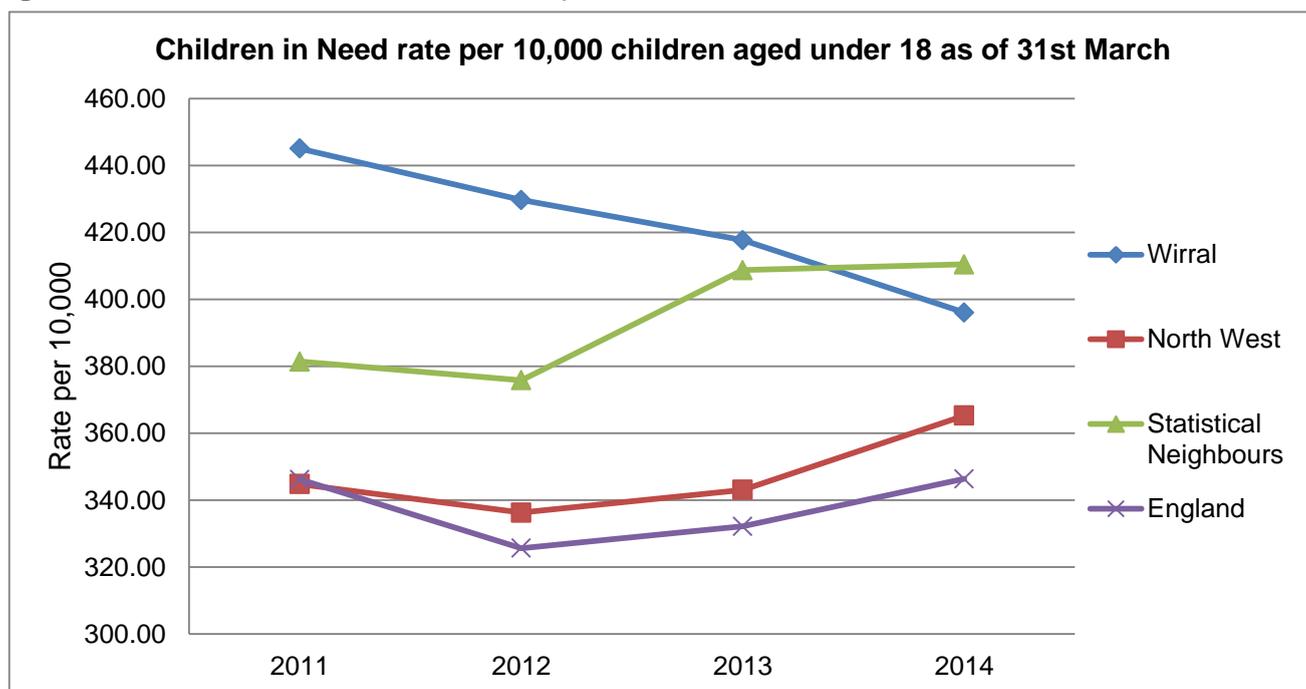
The most recent figures indicate that on 31st March 2014 Wirral had 396 children per 10,000 who were CIN, higher than the North West (365 per 10,000) and England (346 per 10,000), but lower than our statistical neighbours (410 per 10,000).

Table 1: Children in Need rate per 10,000 children aged under 18 as of 31st March				
	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	445.10	429.70	417.70	396.10
North West	344.80	336.30	343.10	365.30
Statistical Neighbours	381.43	375.84	408.76	410.49
England	346.20	325.70	332.20	346.40

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

While the overall rate of children in need is high in the Wirral the rate has been steadily decreasing year on year since 2011. This appears to be against the trend for the region and nationally where the rate has increased over time but remains lower than Wirral. Our statistical neighbours also have an increasing rate of children in need and in 2014 this was higher than in Wirral. These trends are shown in Figure 1: Wirral rate of children in need per 10,000 children provided below.

Figure 1: Wirral rate of children in need per 10,000 children



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

In Wirral the highest recorded need at initial assessment for Children in Need was family dysfunction (39.1% in 2013) followed by abuse or neglect (32.2% in 2013) compared to England (47.2% in 2014) and the North west (54.7% in 2014) where abuse and neglect is the highest reason for referral. In the North West family dysfunction was much lower compared to Wirral at 19% in 2014, this is also reflected nationally (18.6% in 2014).

	Wirral			North West			England		
	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014
Missing/Unknown	0	0	0	0.4	0	0	0.2	0	0
N1 - Abuse or neglect	34.4	32.7	32.2	55.9	55.2	54.7	45.5	47.3	47.2
N2 - Child's disability or illness	9.5	9.6	11.4	8.7	8.2	8.3	11.8	11.5	10.5
N3 - Parent's disability or illness	1.9	1.4	1.6	2.6	2.3	2.5	3.3	3.1	2.9
N4 - Family in acute stress	8.6	7.5	6.7	9.2	10.3	8.8	9.6	10.2	9.7
N5 - Family dysfunction	38.4	36.7	39.1	16.9	17.4	19	18.1	18	18.6
N6 - Socially unacceptable behaviour	5.2	4.6	3.3	2	2	2.1	2	1.8	2
N7 - Low income	1.1	-	-	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.6	0.6
N8 - Absent parenting	0.9	1	1.1	1.5	1.6	1.5	3.2	2.9	2.6
N9 - Cases other than children in need	-	-	-	1	1	0.4	1.1	0.9	1
N0 - Not stated	-	5.5	3.6	1.6	1.7	2.5	4.8	3.6	5

Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

The percentage of children in need in Wirral with a disability is high compared to the North West Region and England. While the percentage of children in need with a disability has decreased both in the North West (11.2% in 2012, 10.7% in 2014) and England (14% in 2012, 13.2% in 2014) in Wirral the percentage has increased from 16.7% in 2012 to 17.8% in 2014. This is represented in Table 3, below.

	Number of children in need at 31 March			Number of whom have a disability recorded			Percentage having a disability recorded		
	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	2,904	2,820	2,674	485	451	475	16.7	16.0	17.8
North West	50,500	51,600	55,000	5,700	5,600	5,900	11.2	10.8	10.7
England	369,400	378,600	397,600	51,800	52,300	52,600	14.0	13.8	13.2

Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

Of those children in need with a disability the highest percentage had a learning disability (48.8% in 2014) in line with the North West (45.9% in 2014) and nationally (44.3% in 2014). This was followed by Autism / Asperger's Syndrome 28.4% (2014) and Behaviour 20.9% (2014) in line with both the region and nationally.

Wirral differs from the region and nationally in that it has low numbers of children in need reported to have a communication disability 6.7% in 2014 compared to 21.4% in the North West (2014) and nationally 23% (2014). Similarly Wirral has low numbers of children in need reported to have a mobility or incontinence disability compared to the North West and nationally.

	Wirral			North West			England		
	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014
Autism/ Asperger Syndrome	25.8	25.5	28.4	23.6	25.2	27.5	27.7	28.8	29.0
Behaviour	23.5	23.9	23.4	20.9	21.4	19.5	22.0	23.4	21.9
Communication	5.8	5.3	6.7	18.4	21.1	21.4	22.1	24.0	23.0
Consciousness	8.7	7.3	5.7	6.6	5.2	4.5	6.5	5.9	5.2
Hand Function	-	-	-	3.1	2.2	2.2	5.9	5.8	5.3
Hearing	4.3	4.0	4.4	5.6	4.9	5.1	5.3	5.8	5.4
Incontinence	1.2	-	1.5	5.8	6.6	6.1	9.1	10.0	8.9
Learning	49.9	49.4	48.8	45.6	47.6	47.2	45.9	47.2	44.3
Mobility	16.7	18.8	17.9	21.1	22.0	21.3	22.4	23.2	21.1
Personal Care	11.1	16.6	18.3	10.9	10.3	10.5	15.1	15.4	13.9
Vision	8.5	8.0	7.6	9.9	8.6	8.2	8.6	9.0	8.4
Other Disability	1.4	-	-	16.1	19.6	18.0	20.1	20.1	20.7

Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

Note: Totals do not add to 100% as children may have more than one disability reported.

Low numbers have been suppressed and are represented by an -.

Referrals to children's social care

A referral is taken by children's social care when a parent, professional or member of the public either expresses concern about a specific child's welfare, or makes a request for a service on behalf of a child. Children and young people may also make a direct referral themselves. Not all referrals result in an initial assessment, as children's social care may decide no further action is required following further enquiries.

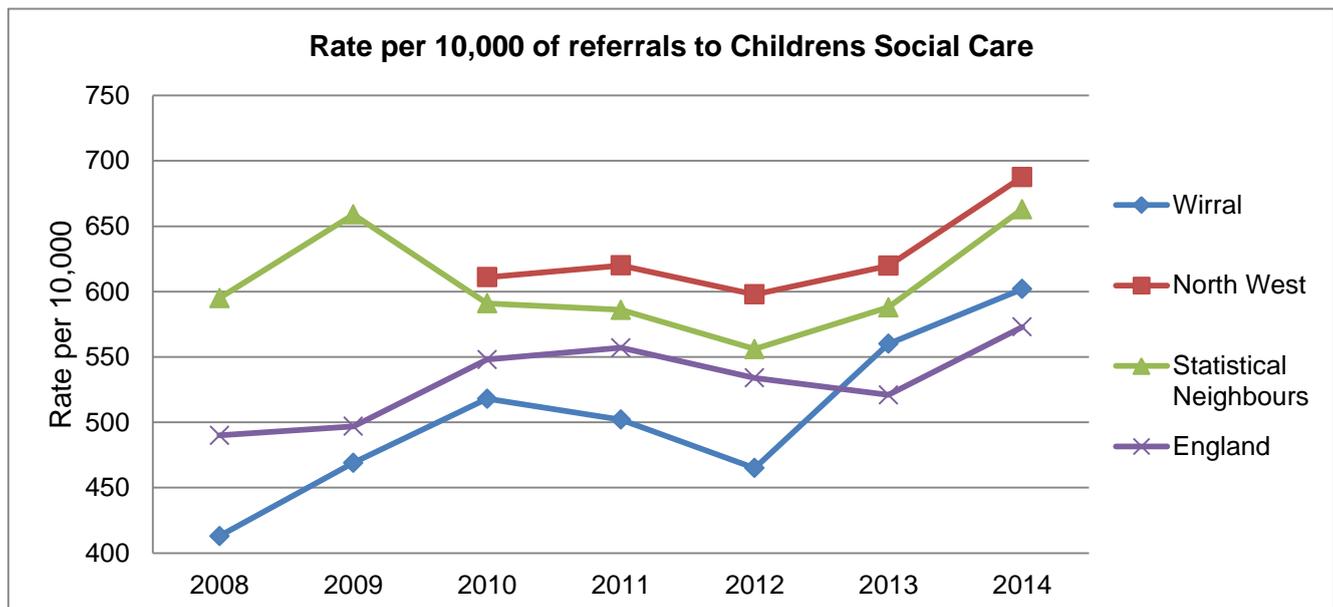
The rate of referrals has fluctuated over time, Wirral had comparatively low rates of referrals in 2008 (413 per 10,000) compared to England (490 per 10,000) and Statistical Neighbours (595 per 10,000). However the rate has increased in 2014 Wirral had 602 referrals per 10,000 population, higher than the England average (573 per 10,000) but significantly lower than both Statistical Neighbours (663 per 10,000) and the North West (688 per 10,000).

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	413	469	518	502	465	560	602
North West	-	-	611	620	598	620	688
Statistical Neighbours	595	659	591	586	556	588	663
England	490	497	548	557	534	521	573

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

Figure 2: Wirral rate per 10,000 of referrals to Children's Social Care



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

It is important to note that even though the number of referrals has increased, the referrals accepted by Wirral, after further enquiries, in most cases results in an assessment. Wirral have very few referrals that are closed with no further action. In 2014 only 0.4% of referrals received were closed with no further action compared to 11.7% Regionally, 14.1% Nationally and 7.3% amongst statistical neighbours.

Table 6: Percentage of referrals to children's social care closed with no further action			
	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	2.30	0.70	0.40
North West	16.00	16.40	11.70
Statistical Neighbours	7.36	10.08	7.32
England	15.60	14.50	14.10

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

Referrals going onto initial assessment are high. In 2013, the last year that figures for Initial Assessments were published, 93.4% of referrals received an assessment. This is higher than the region (77.9%), statistical neighbours (82.7%) and England (74.4%).

Table 7: Percentage of referrals to children's social care going on to initial assessment									
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Wirral	20.4	42.4	40.5	65.9	64.3	74.7	89.9	95.3	93.4
North West	41.0	45.5	46.3	62.3	64.3	-	77.3	77.9	77.9
Statistical Neighbours	57.6	61.8	68.9	68.6	70.2	74.1	86.5	86.9	82.7
England	52.6	52.7	56.0	59.4	63.8	65.5	71.5	74.6	74.4

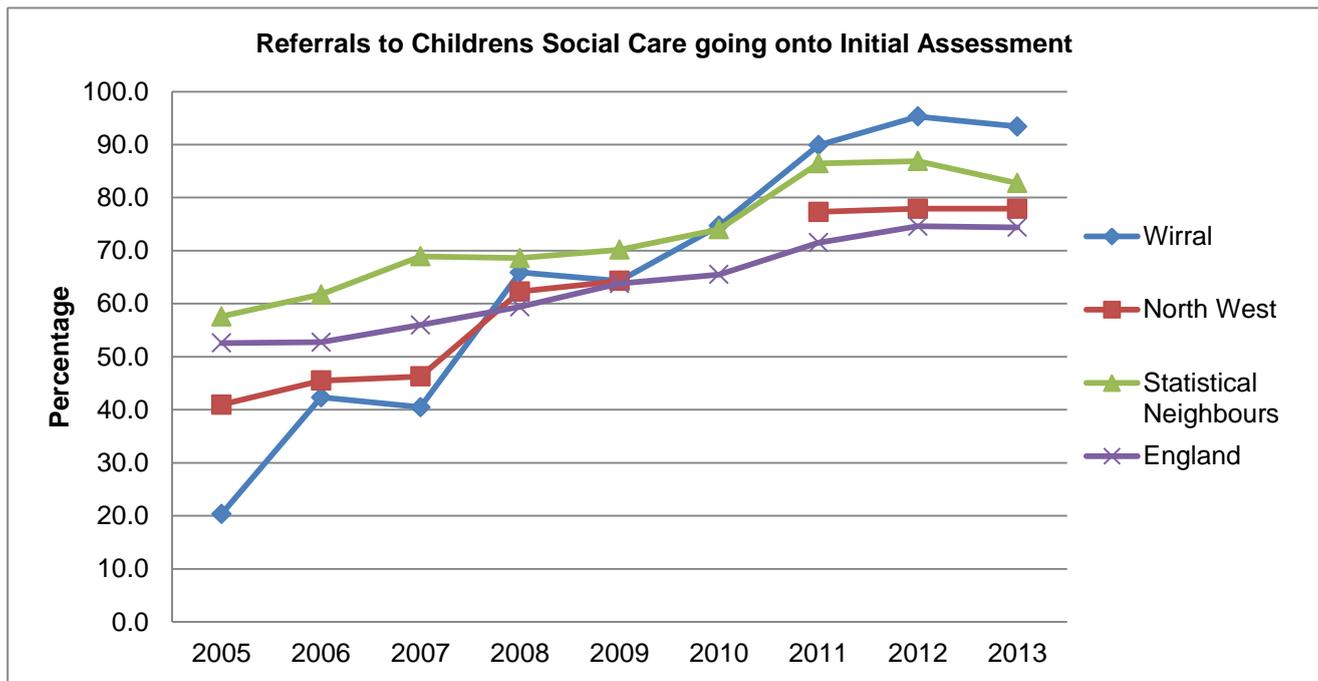
Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

There has been a steady increase in the percentage of referrals receiving an assessment since 2005; however since 2009 Wirral has consistently assessed more referrals than its comparators.

It is important to note that in the year 2012 -2013 the Single Assessment was introduced, in some authorities this was implemented within the reporting year and figures for these authorities for Initial and Core Assessment will be lower than Wirral who implemented the Single Assessment (SWAN) from April 2014. Figures on Initial and Core Assessment are not available for 2014 due to these changes.

Figure 3: Referrals to children’s social care going onto initial assessment



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral’s statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds. No figures for North West for 2009/10 and 2010/11

In line with the increased rate of referrals receiving an initial assessment the rate per 10,000 of initial assessment for children and young people has also increased, as may be seen in Table 8. The rate in 2005 for Wirral was very low (165 per 10,000) compared to comparators. However by 2012 this had increased steadily to 443 per 10,000. While this was slightly lower than the region (466 per 10,000) and statistical neighbours (473 per 10,000) it was higher than the national rate of 398 per 10,000. In 2013 the rate in Wirral increased further to 523 initial assessments per 10,000 population under 18.

While caution is needed in comparing figures for the year 2012 -2013 due to the introduction of the Single Assessment, as explained above, it is notable that the rate of initial assessment being undertaken increased not just for Wirral but also regionally (483 per 10,000) and amongst our Statistical Neighbours (481 per 10,000) indicating an overall increase not just in referral activity but also those referrals that required initial assessment and initial assessment activity itself.

Table 8: Rate* of initial assessments completed per 10,000 children aged under 18									
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Wirral	165	276	280	272	301	387	451	443	523
North West	207	246	258	315	350	-	479	466	483
Statistical Neighbours	315	340	362	374	372	409	456	473	481
England	262	272	277	291	317	359	398	398	387

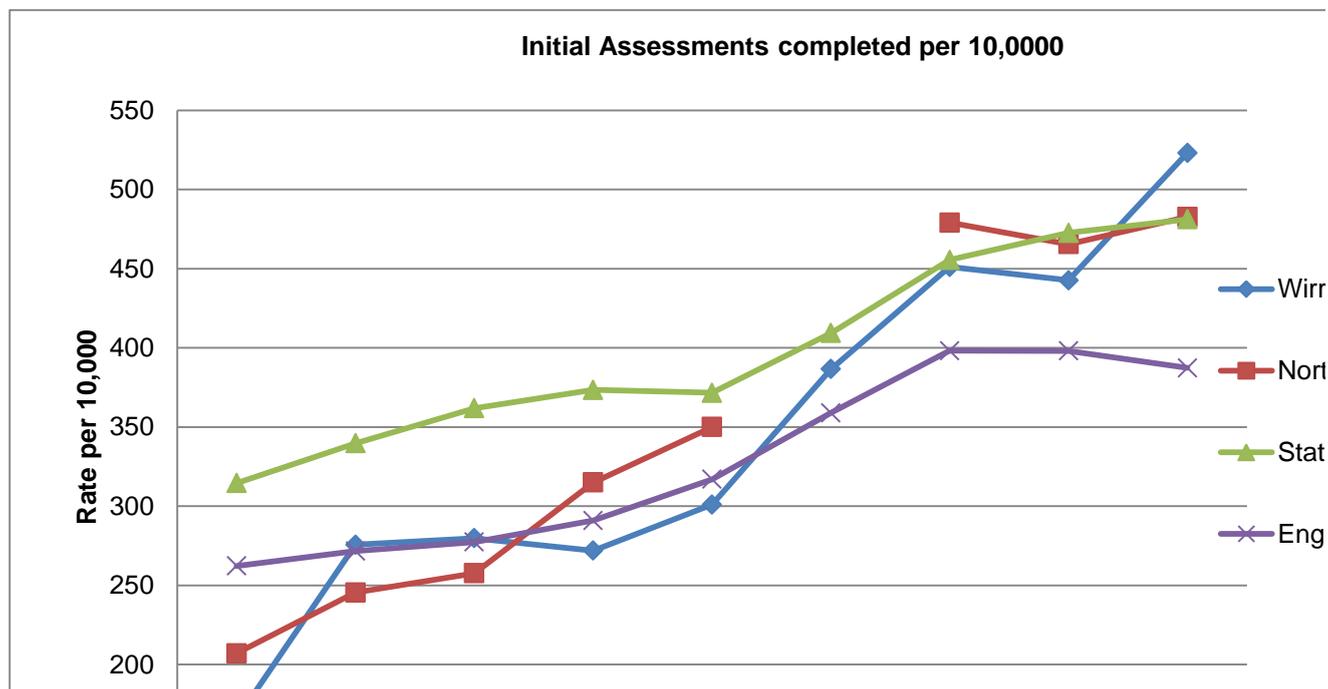
Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: *Rate per 10,000

Wirral’s statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

The increase in initial assessments undertaken may be seen most clearly in the graph provided below (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Rate of initial assessments completed per 10,000 population aged under 18



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral’s statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

While the number of referrals to Children’s Social Care has increased year on year and the number of Initial Assessment being undertaken has also increased the percentage completed within 10 working days has also improved. In 2010 Wirral completed 75% of its initial assessments within 10 working days of referral, roughly in line with the national percentage (75.5%) and only a little below our Statistical Neighbours. In 2013 completion rates in Wirral had increased to 88.3% higher than the region (80.3%), Statistical Neighbours (76.3%) and nationally (75.5%).

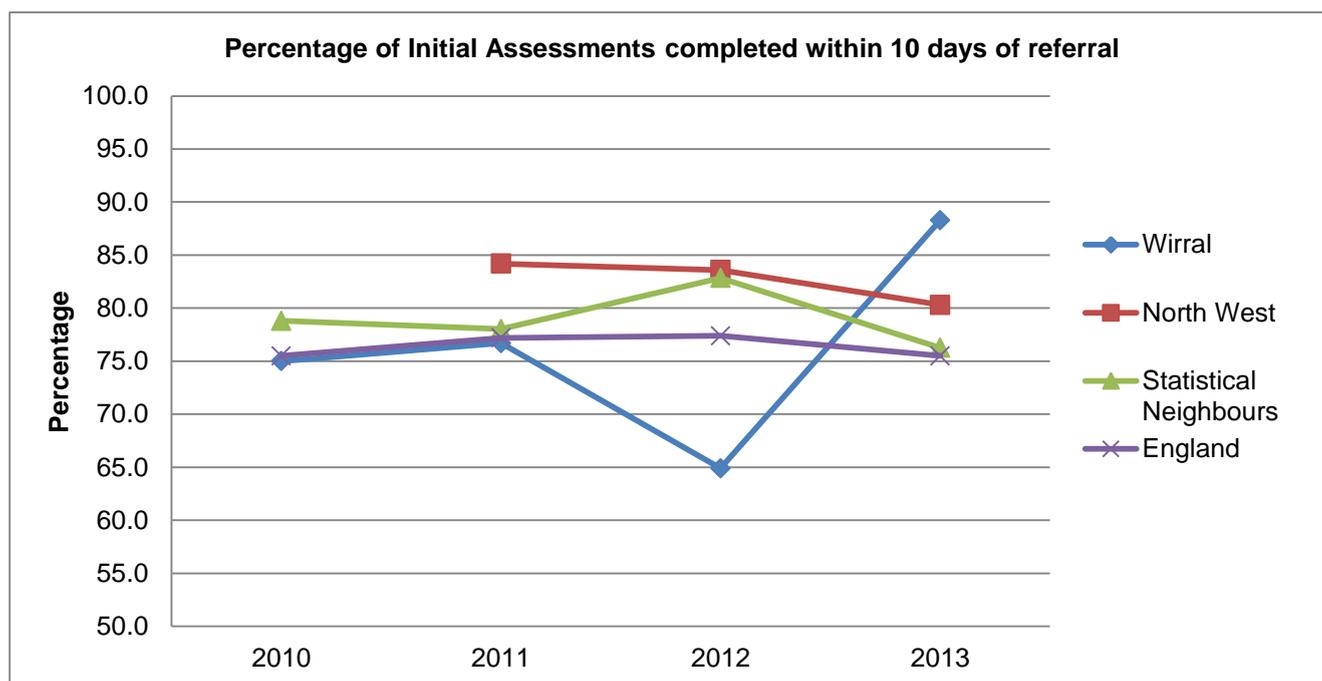
	2010	2011	2012	2013
Wirral	75.0	76.7	64.9	88.3
North West	-	84.2	83.6	80.3
Statistical Neighbours	78.8	78.0	82.9	76.3
England	75.5	77.2	77.4	75.5

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral’s statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

The graph below (Figure 5) illustrates the percentage completion rates, year on year, for initial assessments within 10 working days of referral. It should be noted that while these appear consistent there was a sharp decrease in 2011/12 for Wirral were completion dropped to 64.9%. This is a feature of Core assessment completion rates for this year as well where the percentage completed dropped to 67.1%. This was identified at the time as a lack of capacity within Assessment Teams which was resolved by increasing the number of Assessment Teams from four to five in order to meet demand.

Figure 5: Percentage of Initial Assessments for children's social care carried out within 10 working days of referral



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

As a measure of through-put the number of Core Assessment completed per 10,000 population also indicates an increase in assessment activity between 2010 and 2013. Table 10 shows that for Wirral core assessment activity increased from 145.6 per 10,000 in 2010 to 277.7 per 10,000 in 2013. Increases were also seen in all of Wirral's comparators both regionally, against statistical neighbours and against the England rate.

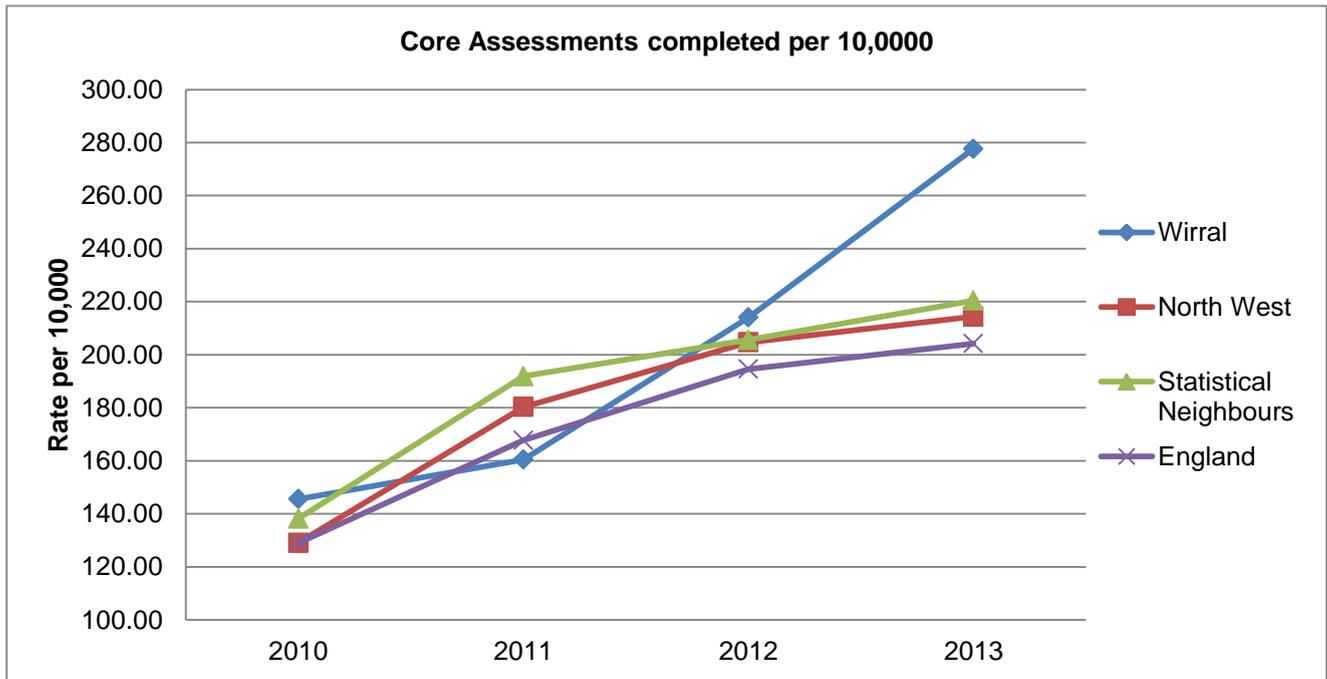
	2010	2011	2012	2013
Wirral	145.60	160.50	214.10	277.70
North West	129.10	180.30	204.70	214.40
Statistical Neighbours	138.20	191.93	205.60	220.43
England	129.00	167.80	194.60	204.20

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

Of interest is the steady increase in the rate in Wirral as indicated in Figure 6. This graph shows a steady increase in the rate at which core assessment were being undertaken however from 2012 to 2013 this increased ahead of all comparators with Wirral undertaking 60 to 70 core assessment more per 10, 000 population (277.7 per 10,000) than statistical neighbours (220.43 per 10,000), regionally (214.4 per 10,000) and nationally (204.2 per 10,000).

Figure 6: Rate of Core Assessment completed per 10,000 population aged under 18



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

The number of core assessments being undertaken has increased year on year, however the percentage of core assessments completed within 35 days has at times been variable. In 2013 the percentage of core assessment completed within 35 days in Wirral was relatively high (81.1%) with the region achieving a 78.1% completion rate within timescales, nationally 76.7% completion and amongst statistical neighbours this was 75%.

However, in the previous year, 2012, Wirral percentage completion rate was relatively low 67.1% compared to others. Indicating the requirement to monitor referral, initial assessment and core assessment activity closely in order to identify and meet demand effectively.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Wirral	65.4	82.4	89.8	79.1	75.9	74.6	67.1	81.1
North West	70.8	80.2	79.7	77.7		77.7	76.3	78.1
Statistical Neighbours	77.8	84.3	81.8	80.0	78.0	77.5	83.0	75.0
England	74.4	78.4	79.6	78.2	78.1	75.0	75.5	76.7

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

The percentage of re-referrals in Wirral has been consistent with 20.2% or Referrals being re-referrals in 2011 compared to 22% in 2014 (Table 12).

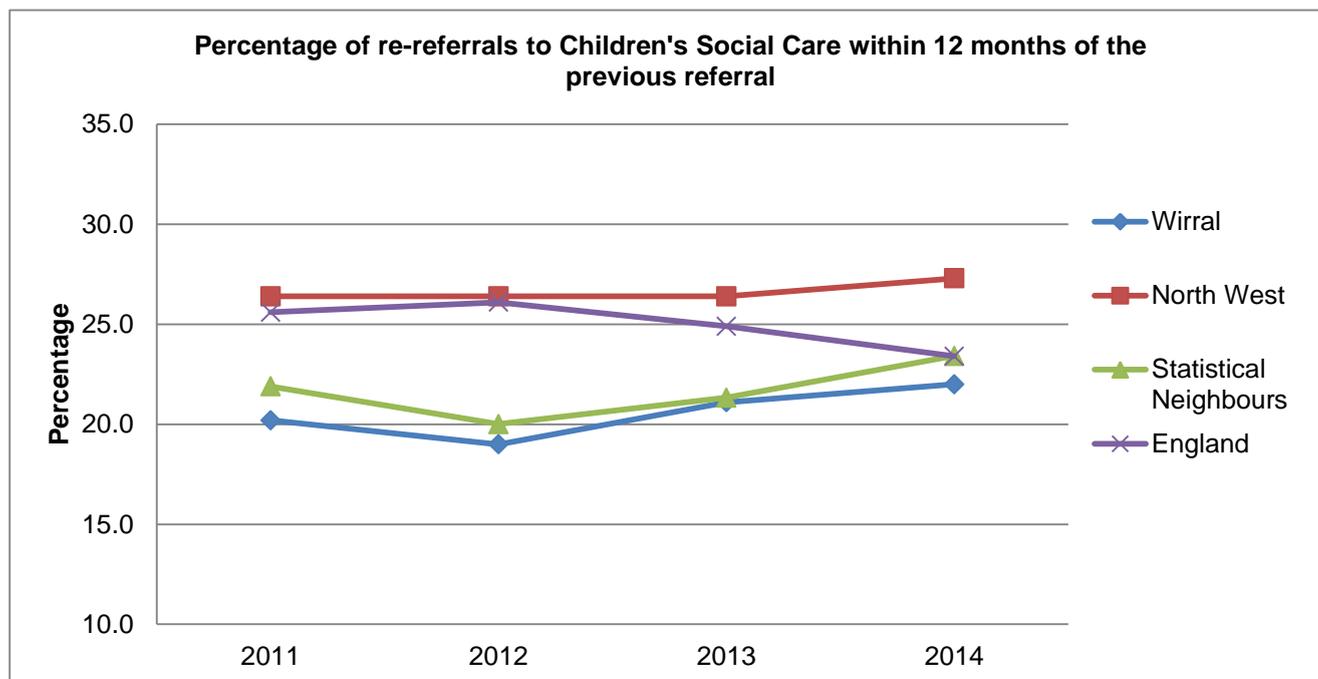
Table 12: Percentage of re-referrals to children's social care within 12 months of the previous referral				
	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	20.2	19.0	21.1	22.0
North West	26.4	26.4	26.4	27.3
Statistical Neighbours	21.9	20.0	21.3	23.4
England	25.6	26.1	24.9	23.4

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

As figure 7 shows, the percentage of re-referrals has been consistently below comparators, and significantly lower than re-referrals, in the North West Region. This indicates that high proportion of children and families referred receive an intervention that meets their needs and therefore does not require further intervention.

Figure 7: Percentage of re-referrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months of a previous referral



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

[Current services in relation to need \(Children in Need\)](#)

The rate of referrals to Wirral's Children Social Care has increased over time. Wirral had comparatively low rates of referrals in 2008 (413 per 10,000) compared to England (490 per 10,000) and Statistical Neighbours (595 per 10,000). However the rate has increased, in 2014 Wirral had 602 referrals per 10,000 population, higher than the England average (573 per 10,000), but still lower than both Statistical Neighbours (663 per 10,000) and the North West (688 per 10,000). Re-Referral rates are low in Wirral (22% in 2014) compared to our comparators (Figure 7) indicating that a high proportion of children and families referred receive an intervention that meets their needs and therefore does not require further intervention.

Of those children referred an increasingly high percentage received an initial assessment in Wirral (20.4% in 2005, 93.4% in 2013). The percentage in 2013 for Wirral (93.4%) was higher than the North West (77.9%), Statistical Neighbours (82.7%) and England (74.4%) (Figure 3). Not unsurprisingly the rate of initial assessment per 10,000 (Figure 4) has also increased.

In Wirral the number of Core Assessment completed per 10,000 population has increase between 2010 and 2013 (Table 10). Wirral's Core Assessment activity increased from 145.6 per 10,000 in 2010 to 277.7 per 10,000 in 2013. While the completion of both Initial and Core Assessments within timescales has fluctuated in general timescales for both have been above comparators.

With the increased rate of referrals, the high number of Initial and Core Assessment it is not unsurprising that Wirral has high numbers of children in need compared to most other local authorities in 2014 (on 31st March 2014 Wirral had 396 children in need per 10,000 higher than the North West, 365 per 10,000, and England, 346 per 10,000, but lower than our statistical neighbours, 410 per 10,000). However, while the overall rate of children in need is high, in the Wirral the rate has been steadily decreasing year on year since 2011. This appears to be against the trend for the region and nationally where the rate has increased over time but remains lower than Wirral (Figure 1).

This increased pressure is added to by the relatively high and increasing percentage of children in need with a disability in Wirral. Children in need in Wirral with a disability have increased from 16.7% in 2012 to 17.8% in 2014 (Table 3), while the percentage of children in need with a disability has decreased both in the North West (11.2% in 2012, 10.7% in 2014) and England (14% in 2012, 13.2% in 2014).

The increasing proportion of referrals requiring initial assessment and then a core assessment both locally and nationally are a reflection of improvements in the understanding of the appropriateness of making referrals by partners and the complexity of the issues presented. This is resulting in more children requiring longer term interventions and service provision.

[Projected service use \(Children in Need\)](#)

The publication of the revised [Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance in 2013](#) has had an impact on how the local authority and partners safeguard children, with a renewed emphasis on providing early help to children and families which should assist in reducing the number of families requiring high level intervention. Wirral Council is addressing this issue though changes to its structures, strengthening early help and prevention services and developing a single gateway to services.

In addition, Working Together Guidance has introduced a revised assessment process. Initial and Core assessments have been replaced by a single assessment process which should take no longer than 45 days from the point of referral. This is a less prescriptive process that should allow social workers to concentrate more on improving outcomes for children and young people. This also meets with the expressed views of young people about the importance of a relationship with their social worker. However, as this was only introduced in Wirral in April 2014 it is not yet clear how this may affect outcomes.

Children and families have been affected by the general economic climate, including the pressures of unemployment and poverty, combined with government welfare reforms. The impact of these issues is likely to contribute to the increase in referrals.

Child Protection

Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, places a duty on local authorities to make enquiries, or cause enquiries to be made, where it has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm. A court may only make a Care Order or Supervision Order in respect of a child if it is satisfied that:

- The child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm; and
- That the harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to a lack of adequate parental care or control (section 31)

Under Section 31(9) of the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002:

- **'Harm'** means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development, including for example impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another;
- **'Development'** means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development;
- **'Health'** means physical or mental health; and
- **'Ill-treatment'** includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment that are not physical.

Following a section 47 enquiry, an initial child protection conference brings together family members, the child who is the subject of the conference (where appropriate) and those professionals most involved with the child and family. The purpose of the initial conference is to bring together and analyse in an inter-agency setting, the information which has been obtained about the child's development needs, plus the parents' or carers' capacity to respond to these needs, ensure the child's safety and promote the child's health and development within the context of their wider family and environment. The child protection conference may decide that child will be subject to a child protection plan as they are at continuing risk of significant harm.

Level of need (Child Protection)

The number of children subject to a Section 47 enquiry in Wirral has remained stable. The rate per 10,000 of children and young people under 18 years of age subject to Section 47 enquiries was 75 per 10,000 in 2010 and 73 per 10,000 in 2014 (Table 13).

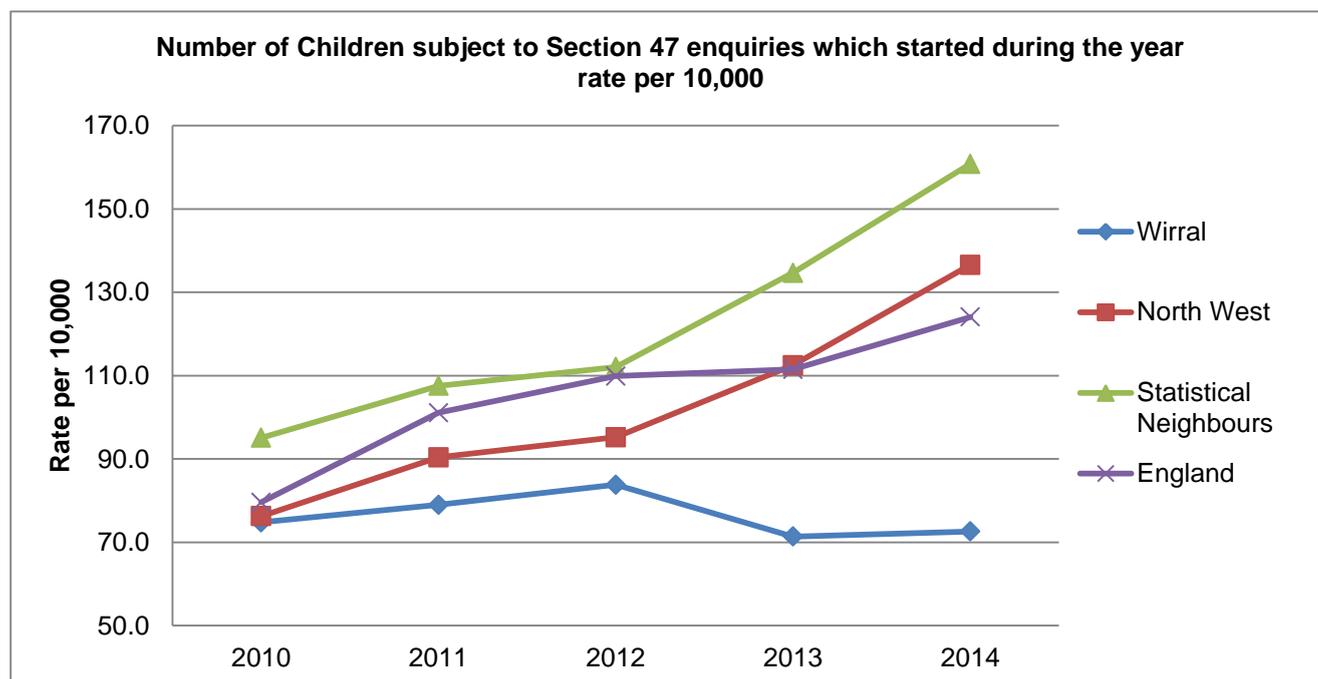
Table 13: Number of Children subject to section 47 enquiries which started during the year rate per 10,000 children					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	74.8	79.0	83.8	71.4	72.6
North West	76.3	90.4	95.2	112.5	136.6
Statistical Neighbours	95.1	107.6	112.1	134.7	160.8
England	79.6	101.1	109.9	111.5	124.1

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

The rate of Section 47 enquiries in Wirral differs quite significantly from comparators in that from 2010 comparators have higher and increasing rates each year. Figure 8 shows the marked increase in the rate amongst comparators, most significantly amongst Statistical Neighbours (95 per 10,000 in 2010 to 161 per 10,000 in 2014). Similarly the rate amongst the North West has increased (76 per 10,000 in 2010 to 137 per 10,000 in 2014) as has the national rate (80 per 10,000 in 2010 to 124 per 10,000 in 2014).

Figure 8: Number of children subject to Section 47 enquiries which started during the year per 10,000 children



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

While a low rate of Section 47 enquiries may be as a result of a low number of referrals received, this does not appear to be the case. A similar comparison may be drawn when considering the number of Section 47 enquiries undertaken as a percentage of referrals (Table 14).

In 2010 14.4% of referrals resulted in Section 47 enquiries in Wirral compared to 12.5% in the North West, 16.1% amongst Statistical Neighbours and 14.5% Nationally. By 2014 the number of referrals resulting in Section 47 enquiries in Wirral was 12.1%, significantly lower than the North West (19.9% in 2014), Statistical Neighbours (24.3% in 2014) and nationally (21.7% in 2014).

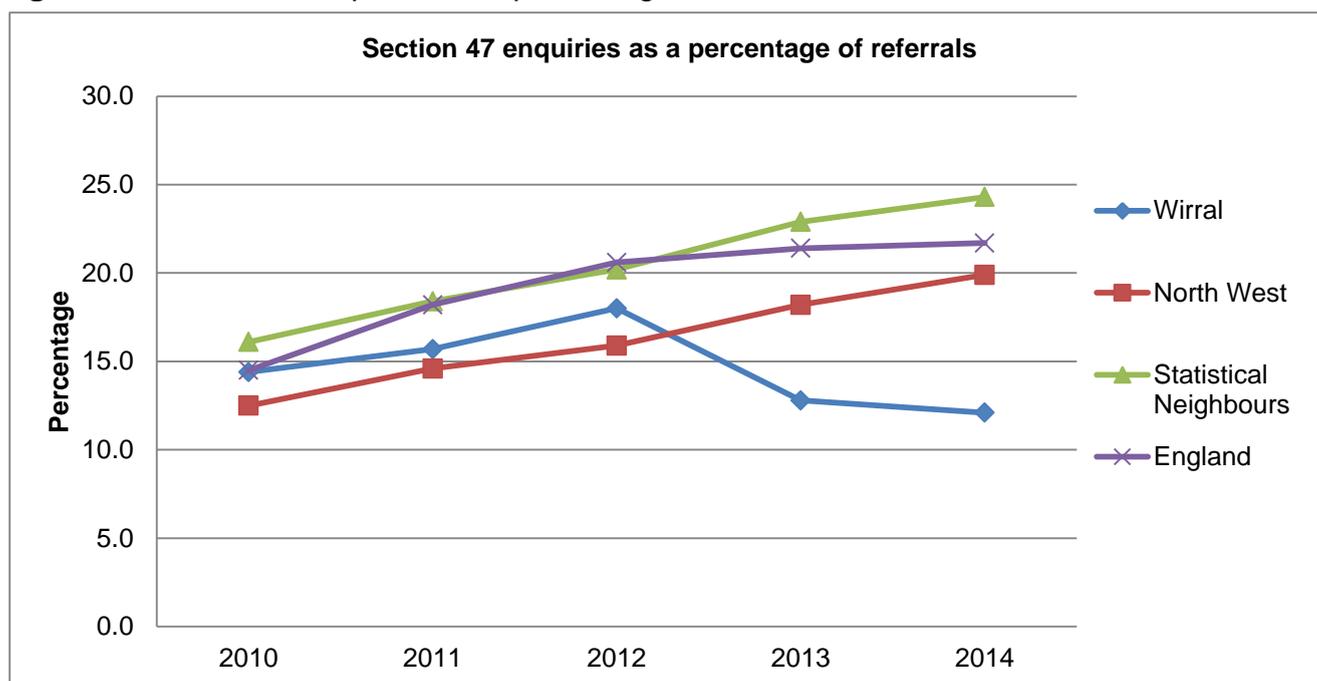
Table 14: Section 47 enquiries as a percentage of referrals					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	14.4	15.7	18.0	12.8	12.1
North West	12.5	14.6	15.9	18.2	19.9
Statistical Neighbours	16.1	18.4	20.2	22.9	24.3
England	14.5	18.2	20.6	21.4	21.7

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

The change in the percentage of referrals progressing to Section 47 Enquiries may most easily be seen in Figure 9 which shows a steady increase in the percentage of referrals going onto Section 47 enquiries for the North West, Statistical Neighbours and Nationally. While in Wirral the percentage increased between 2010 and 2012 and then decreased in 2013 and 2014.

Figure 9: Section 47 enquiries as a percentage of referrals



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

While the rate of Section 47 enquiries may have decreased in Wirral the rate of Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) has not. In 2010 there were 53 children per 10,000 subject of an ICPC, by 2014 this had increased to 63 children per 10,000 (Table 15). This is mirrored in the North West region with 51 children per 10,000 being the subject of an ICPC in 2010 rising to 63 children per 10,000 in 2014. Increases may also be seen amongst Statistical Neighbours and Nationally.

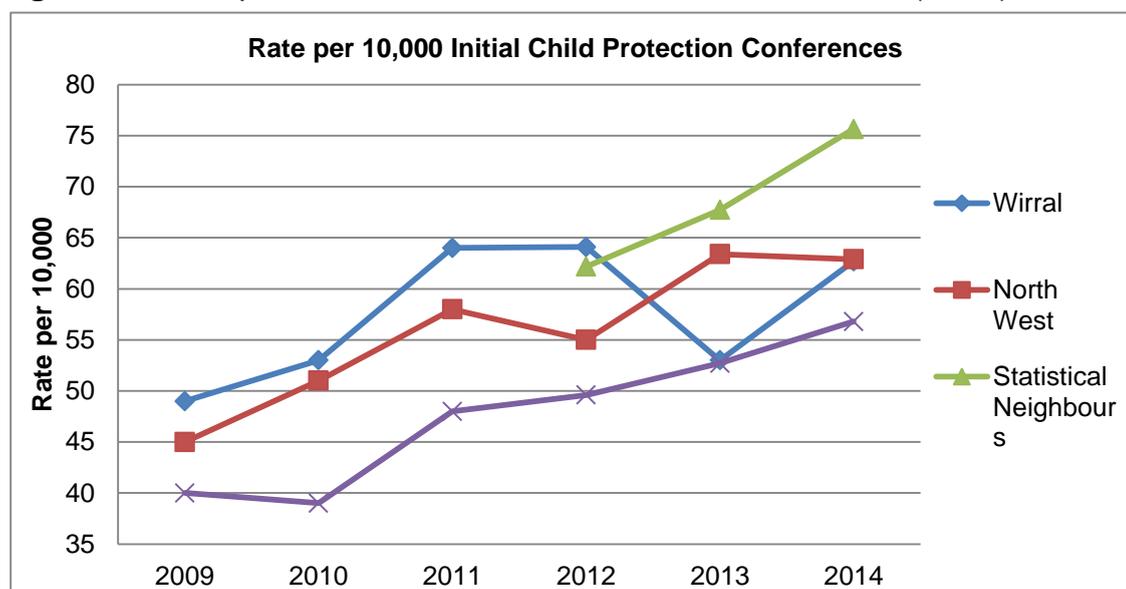
Table 15: Rate per 10,000 Initial Child Protection conferences						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	49	53	64	64	53	63
North West	45	51	58	55	63	63
Statistical Neighbours	-	-	-	62	68	76
England	40	39	48	50	53	57

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

While the rate of initial child protection conferences has increased between 2010 and 2014 between these years both Wirral and the North West have seen some fluctuation in numbers, as may be seen from Figure 10.

Figure 10: Rate per 10,000 Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC)



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

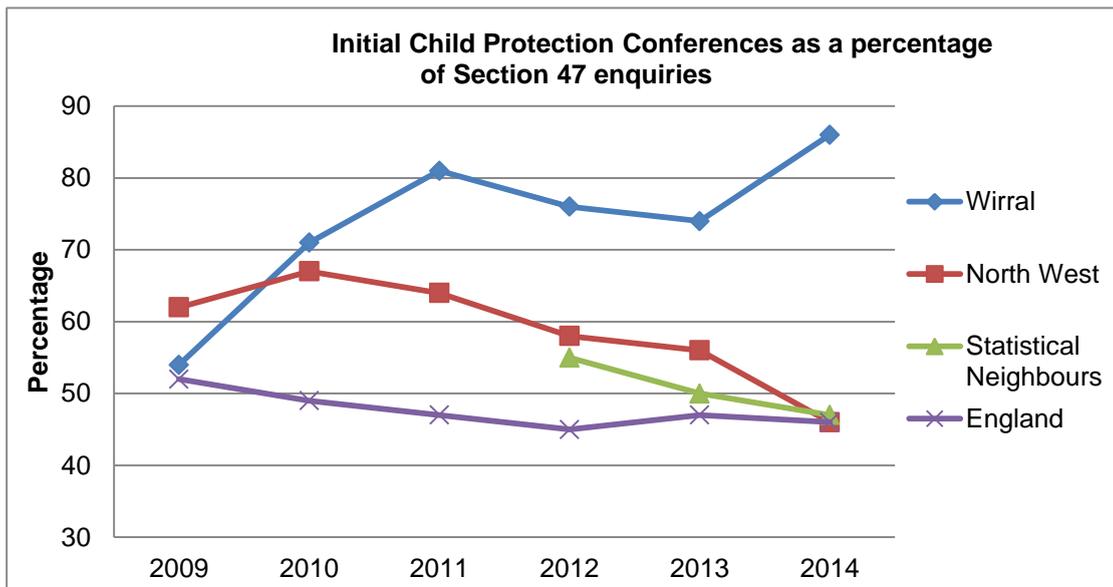
While the overall rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences has increased amongst all comparators, when taken as a percentage of Section 47 enquiries a different picture emerges. Wirral may be seen to have an increased percentage of Section 47 enquiries progressing to Initial Child Protection Conference between 2009 (54%) and 2014 (86%). However amongst Wirral's comparators the opposite appears to be the case, the percentage decrease being most significant in the North West moving from 67% in 2010 to 46% in 2014 (Table 16).

Table 16: Initial Child Protection Conferences as a percentage of Section 47 enquiries						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	54	71	81	76	74	86
North West	62	67	64	58	56	46
Statistical Neighbours	-	-	-	55	50	47
England	52	49	47	45	47	46

Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

Figure 11: Initial Child Protection Conferences as a percentage of Section 47 enquiries



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

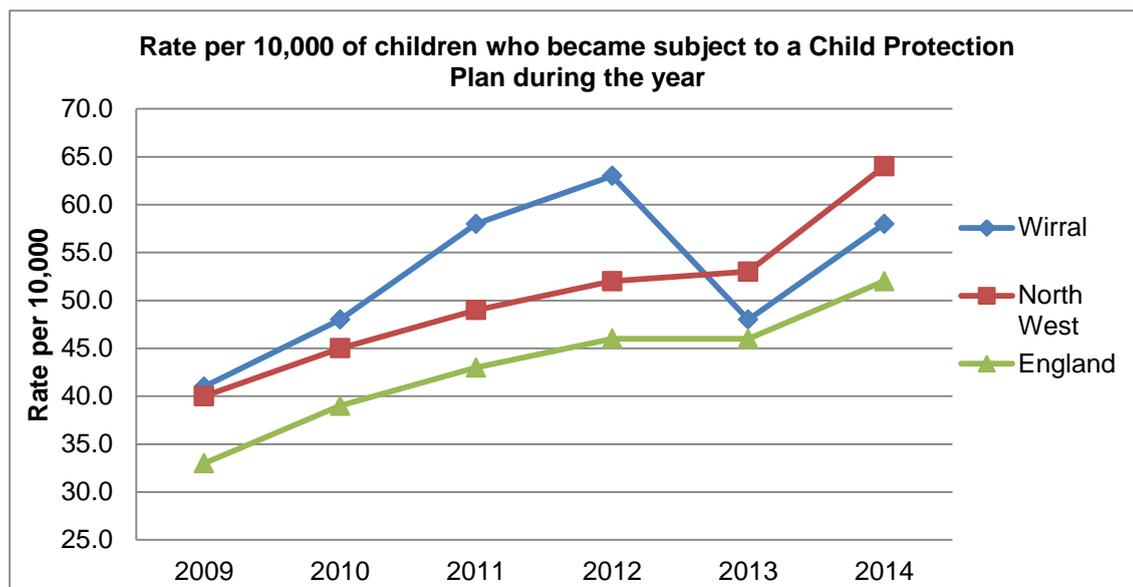
The rate of children who became the subject of a child protection plan in Wirral is similar to comparators. In 2009 41 children per 10,000 were the subject of a child protection plan, similar to the North West (40 per 10,000) but higher than the national rate (33 per 10,000) (Table 17). By 2014 the rate in Wirral had increased to 58 per 10,000, again not dissimilar from the regional rate of 64 per 10,000 but still higher than the national rate of 52 per 10,000.

Table 17: Rate of children who became the subject of a child protection plan per 10,000 children						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	41	48	58	63	48	58
North West	40	45	49	52	53	64
England	33	39	43	46	46	52

Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

The increase in the rate of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan in Wirral has not been a steady one, as Figure 12 demonstrates. While there has been an increase between 2009 and 2014, the high point in Wirral was in 2012 with a rate of 63 children per 10,000. The rate decreased in 2013 in Wirral to 48 per 10,000 before increasing once again in 2014 to 58 per 10,000. The graph does indicate that both regionally and nationally the rate of growth slowed in 2013 before increasing again in 2014.

Figure 12: Rate of children who became the subject of a child protection plan per 10,000 children



Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

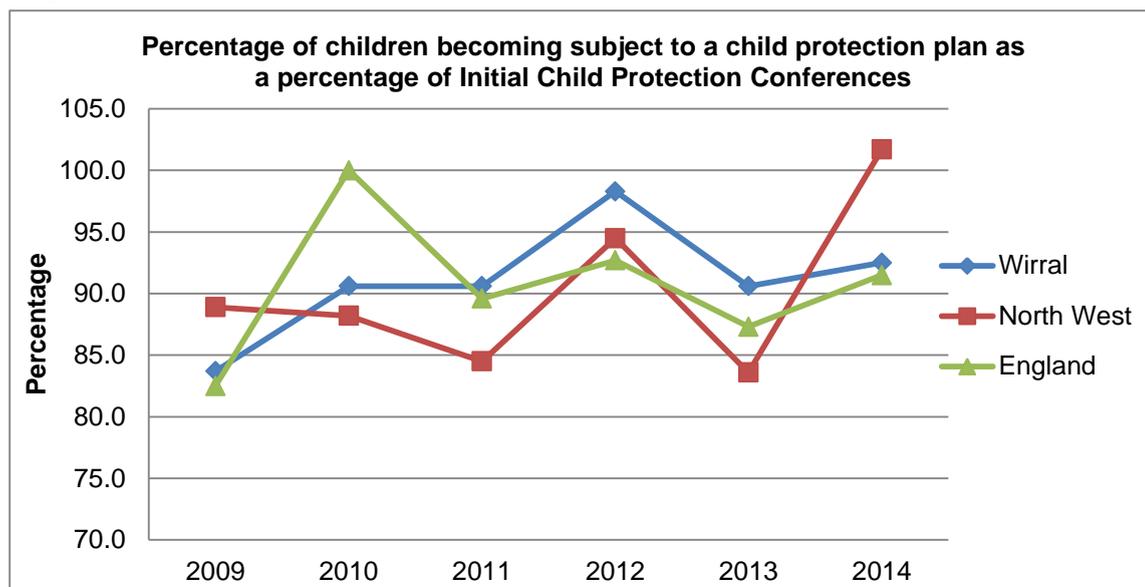
As might be expected when considering children becoming subject to a child protection plan as a percentage of those children that were the subject of an Initial Child Protection Conference there is a strong correlation between this and the rate per 10,000. The highest percentage in Wirral was in 2012 (98.3%) which then reduced in 2013 (90.6%) before increasing again in 2014 (92.5%).

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	83.7	90.6	90.6	98.3	90.6	92.5
North West	88.9	88.2	84.5	94.5	83.6	101.7
England	82.5	100.0	89.6	92.7	87.3	91.5

Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

The percentage of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan has fluctuated over time with increases and decreases between years, however since 2011 the these differences have been reflected both locally, regionally and nationally (Figure 13). In 2012 the percentage increased by 8% in Wirral, regionally this increase was 10% and nationally a more modest of 3% occurred. The percentage decreased in 2013 by 8% in Wirral, 9% regionally and again s more modest 5% nationally. The most recent figures, for 2014, indicate an increased percentage locally, regionally and nationally. Caution needs to be taken when in considering the regional figure for 2014 as there are fairly obviously some problems with this data.

Figure 13: Children becoming subject to a child protection plan as a percentage of children subject to Initial Child Protection Conferences



Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

Table 19 shows the initial reasons, or category of abuse, for children becoming subject to a child protection plan. As may be seen the highest percentage of children become subject to a child protection plan due to abuse (Wirral 39% in 2014, North West 38% in 2014, nationally 42% in 2014). Wirral differs from other areas in that the next highest reason is Physical Abuse (38% in 2014) were as in the North West and England the next highest reason is Emotional Abuse (North West 37% in 2014, nationally 33% in 2014).

One possible explanation for this may be that in Wirral up to 2014 multiple abuse categories could not be recorded and therefore were a child has been the subject of multiple forms of abuse the most serious, as viewed by the Social Worker, may be selected. This subjective assessment of the reason for a child protection plan may therefore affect the figures.

	Wirral			North West			England		
	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014
Neglect	46.2	41.0	38.8	39.6	38.1	37.7	41.9	41.0	42.1
Physical Abuse	43.4	49.1	38.0	15.3	13.4	13.0	12.2	11.7	10.9
Sexual Abuse	5.0	5.3	11.7	4.6	4.1	5.1	5.1	4.8	4.7
Emotional Abuse	5.4	4.7	11.5	28.2	30.7	36.8	28.4	31.7	33.0
Multiple	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.3	13.8	7.5	12.4	10.8	9.3

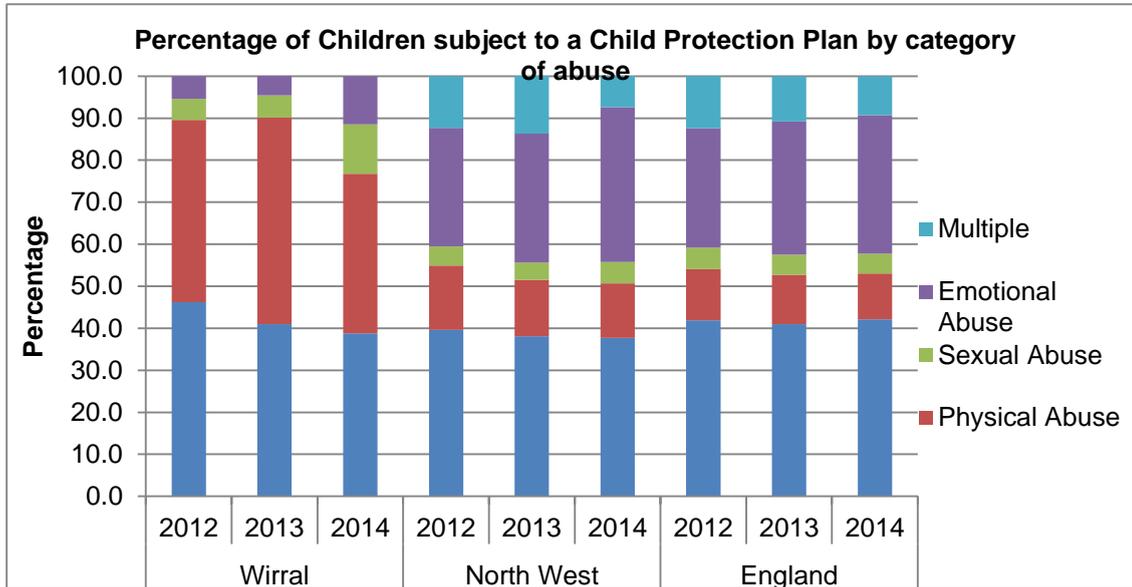
Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

Note: Wirral's case recording system up to 2014 did not allow for recording multiple initial category of abuse

The reason for children becoming the subject of a child protection has changed year on year as figure 14 demonstrates. In Wirral the percentage of children who were the subject of neglect or physical abuse has reduced. In 2012 46% of children were neglected by 2014 this had reduced to 39%; similarly the percentage of children in Wirral who were the subject of physical abuse has also reduced (43% in 2012 to 38% in 2014).

There has been a corresponding increase in the percentage of children subject to sexual or emotional abuse. In 2012 5% of Wirral children, subject to a child protection plan, experienced emotional abuse, by 2014 this has increased to 12%, similarly the percentage of children in Wirral who were the subject of sexual abuse has also increased (5% in 2012 to 12% in 2014).

Figure 14: Initial category of abuse for children subject to child protection plan for the year ending 31st March as percentage of the total



Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

Note: Wirral's case recording system up to 2014 did not allow for recording multiple initial category of abuse

Children who cease to be the subject of a child protection plan do so in line with comparators (Table 20). The highest percentage of children cease to be the subject of a plan between 6 months to a year (42% in 2014) in line with the region (39% in 2014) and nationally (40% in 2014). The second highest percentage of those children ceasing to be on a plan is between 1 and 2 years (27% in 2014), again roughly in line with the region (23% in 2014) and nationally (25% in 2014).

Between 2012 and 2014 there has been a change in the percentage of children ceasing to be on a plan for 6 months or less in Wirral. Increasingly children spend less time on a child protection plan in Wirral, less than 3 months on a plan has increased from 13% in 2012 to 17% in 2014 while those on a plan between 3 to 6 months has decreased from 16% in 2012 to 11% in 2014. This change brings Wirral more in line with its comparators both regionally and nationally.

Table 20: Percentage of children who ceased to be the subject of a child protection plan during the year ending 31 March, by length of time as the subject of a plan

		< 3 months	> 3 months < 6 months	> 6 months < 1 year	> 1 year < 2 years	> 2 years
Wirral	2012	13	16	39	29	4
	2013	16	17	39	24	4
	2014	17	11	42	27	4
North West	2012	20	10	40	25	5
	2013	19	11	40	25	5
	2014	23	12	39	23	5
England	2012	20	10	38	26	6
	2013	19	10	39	26	5
	2014	20	10	40	25	5

Source: DfE: Characteristics of Children in Need in England, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

The percentage of children being subject to a child protection plan for a second time has been variable between 11% and 19% between 2009 and 2014 (Table 21).

Table 21: Percentage of children subject to a Child Protection plan for a second time

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	11	17	18	19	17	12
North West	13	-	13	15	15	16
Statistical Neighbours	11	15	13	13	16	14
England	14	13	13	14	15	16

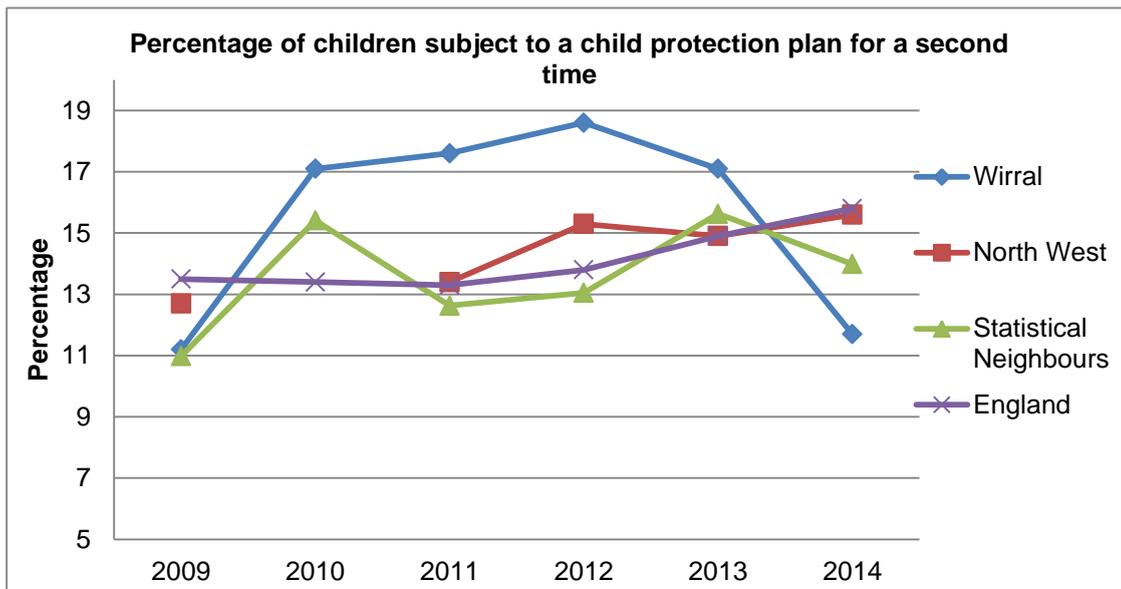
Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

Figure 15 shows that this variation in re-registrations on a child protection plan is not shared by comparators. Both regionally and nationally there is a slightly upward but consistent trend. While there is a less obvious trend amongst statistical neighbours the variations are less than those shown in the Wirral.

Wirral's variable rate of re-registrations may be due to the variability of response to the first child protection plan where issue have not been addressed effectively requiring the child to be subject to a second child protection plan.

Figure 15: Percentage of children subject to a Child Protection plan for a second time



Source: Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT), 14th January 2015

Note: Wirral's statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-On-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

[Current services in relation to need \(Child Protection\)](#)

The services that children and young people and their families receive when they are subject to child protection enquiries include an allocated social worker to work with the family, ongoing social work assessments and other specialist assessments, child protection multi-agency meetings to plan the intervention, the provision of other workers to support the family, nursery provision, and parenting support programmes.

The increasing number of children subject to child protection enquiries and plans has put increasing pressure on social work services and related family support services.

[Projected service use - Child Protection](#)

The current economic climate, increasing child poverty and the government's welfare reform programme are all likely to mean increasing pressure on families resulting in a continuing increase in the use of child protection services. The expectation is however, that earlier intervention through targeted services will have an impact in reducing the need for child protection services.

An increased focus on early intervention through targeted services should enable support to be provided as safe alternatives to being part of the child protection process.

Children Looked After

Whilst children are best looked after within their families with parents playing a full part in their lives, sometimes compulsory intervention in family life is necessary to safeguard the health and wellbeing of children.

There are two ways in which local authorities assume the responsibility to provide care for children and young people. One is through voluntary arrangements (Section 20 Children Act 1989). The other is through an order made by the Court under Section 31 (Care Order or Supervision Order) Children Act 1989 or Section 38 (Interim Care Order) Children Act 1989.

The decision for a child to become Looked After will be made by Wirral Council in the following circumstances:

- All attempts at intervention to maintain and support the child with his or her family have broken down;
- The child has been abandoned;
- The child would be at risk of significant harm by remaining with the family;
- The child is disabled and a series of short break placements is necessary to provide respite for his or her carers.

Wirral Council has the responsibility as a 'Corporate Parent' to improve outcomes and actively promoting the life chances of children they look after. This is done while they are in care and by securing permanency through adoption or special guardianship if they are unable to return to their birth family.

Level of need (Children Looked After)

Wirral has a high overall number of children in care. As at 31st March 2014 the total population was 670 (99 rate per 10,000). This is higher than both the North West and England averages. (Table 22 & Table 23)

Table 22: Numbers of children looked after as at 31st March					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	630	680	670	665	670
North West Average	487	493	495	513	533
England	64,470	65,500	67,070	68,060	68,840

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Note: Local figures rounded to the nearest 5, regional and national figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Table 23: Rate per 10,000 population of children looked after as at 31st March					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	92	100	99	98	99
North West Average	74	76	76	78	81
England	57	58	59	60	60

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Wirral has a lower percentage of young children (0-4 years of age) (Table 24) in care than the North West average however it does have a higher percentage of 10-15 year olds in care compared to both the England Average and North West average. Having said this, due to the large looked after population Wirral has more children in care in each age group than regionally.

Table 24: Number of children looked after by age groups as at 31st March 2014

	Under 1	1 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 15	16+
Wirral (Number)	25	105	170	260	110
North West Average (Number)	30	104	125	189	84
England (Number)	3,880	11,440	13,920	25,140	14,460
Wirral (%)	4	16	25	39	16
North West Average (%)	6	20	24	35	16
England (%)	6	17	20	37	21

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Note: Local figures rounded to the nearest 5, regional and national figures rounded to the nearest 10.

In Table 25, Wirral's children in care population has a high percentage that is subject to Full Care Orders (66%) compared to both the North West (55%) and the England Average (46%). By comparison the percentage of children subject to S20 (voluntarily accommodated) is low in Wirral (12%) when compared regionally (16%) and with the England Average (28%). The use of Placement Orders in Wirral is low (6%) when compared regionally (13%) and with the England Average (13%).

Table 25: Percentage of Children looked after by legal status as at 31st March

	Wirral				North West	England			
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014
Interim Care Orders	29	25	14	16	16	22	20	17	12
Full Care Orders	56	61	63	66	55	39	40	42	46
Freed for Adoption	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	-
Placement Order Granted	4	3	9	6	13	8	11	14	13
Accommodated under S20	11	11	14	12	16	31	29	27	28
Youth justice legal statuses	-	0	0	0	-	-	-	1	-

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Note: Low numbers have been suppressed and are represented by an -. Local figures rounded to the nearest 5, regional and national figures rounded to the nearest 10.

The rate at which children enter and leave care during 2013-14 are similar (Table 26 & Table 27), while the rate for both has increased since 2008/09. This is reflected in the continuing high numbers of children looked after.

Table 26: The rate (per 10,000) children started to be looked after during the year ending 31st March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	24	24	30	28	28	30
North West	25	27	26	26	29	32
England	23	25	24	25	25	27

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Table 27: The rate (per 10,000) children ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31st March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wirral	22	24	24	29	30	30
North West	24	24	26	27	26	29
England	22	22	24	25	24	27

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Wirral uses Foster Care for the majority of the children in its care (500, 75%) which is roughly in line with both the North West region (73%) and England (75%). Wirral has a high percentage (12%) of children placed with parents compared to the national picture of 5%. (Table 28).

Table 28: Number of children looked after by placement type as at 31st March 2014				
	Wirral		North West	England
	Number	%	%	%
Foster placements	500	75	73	75
Placed for adoption	15	2	5	5
Placement with parents	75	12	10	5
Other placement in the community	25	3	2	3
Secure Units, children's homes and hostels	45	6	8	9
Other residential settings	-	-	2	2
Residential schools	5	1	1	1
Missing – absent for >24 hours from agreed placement	-	-	-	-
Other placement	0	0	-	-

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Note: Low numbers have been suppressed and are represented by an -.

Local figures rounded to the nearest 5, regional and national figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Interestingly the majority of this type of care is provided directly by the local authority (72.4%) considerably more than other authorities (North West = 57.4%, England = 57.4%) as Table 29 describes. Correspondingly the use of private provision in both Foster Care and Residential care is low 14.9% compared to others (North West = 28.3%, England = 32.9%).

Table 29: Number of children looked after by placement provider as at 31st March 2014				
	Wirral		North West	England
	Number	%	%	%
Own provision (by the Local Authority)	485	72.4	57.4	57.4
Other Local Authority provision	-	-	2.2	1.7
Other public provision (e.g. by a PCT etc.)	0	0	0.4	0.5
Private provision	100	14.9	28.3	32.9
Voluntary / Third sector provision	-	-	1.9	2.5
Parents or other person with parental responsibility	75	11.2	9.7	4.7
Placement provider not reported.	-	-	0.2	0.3

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Note: Low numbers have been suppressed and are represented by an -.

Local figures rounded to the nearest 5, regional and national figures rounded to the nearest 10.

As most children are placed with foster carers, there is pressure on the local authority to recruit sufficient foster carers to meet local need. It is well recognised that placement within a stable home situation can be more beneficial, compared to living in residential care. Wirral has made some improvement in the number of foster carers recruited, it is recognized that in an increasingly diverse society further work is required in order to attract the range of foster carers required to meet the needs of our children and young people. In addition the foster carers that are currently approved need to be retained in order to meet demand, as well as to increase the skills available in order to meet the range of support the children and young people require. This has been supported by the 'Skills' Fee available to all foster carers based upon their

continuing professional development. However, the use of independent fostering agencies in order to meet placement numbers and on occasion demand for foster carers with the necessary skills remains. This is primarily due to a shortage of foster carers able to take teenage placements. Targeted foster carer recruitment is taking place to ensure there are sufficient places available.

Table 30: Approved Foster Carers, on 31st March each year				
	2011	2012	2013	2014
White	456	496	528	538
Non-white	4	8	7	7
Refused to answer	0	0	1	0
Total	460	504	536	545

Source: LA Fostering Dataset

Children and young people can leave care for a number of reasons. This can be a return home to live with their birth family, it can be a planned move to permanency outside their birth family through adoption, residence order (RO) or Special Guardianship (SGO) or as a young person reached adulthood they can move to independent living or adult residential care.

Of those that ceased to be looked after 25% entered some form of Independent Living arrangement, significantly higher than the North West region (10.1%) and higher than England (22.1%). When taking Adoption, Residence Orders and Special Guardianships together 40% of Wirral children ceased to be looked after due to these orders, this is higher than comparable figures for the North West (36.6%) and England (33.1%). By comparison the number of children returning to live with parents or relatives is slightly lower 27.5% than the North West region 30.8% and England 33.8%.

Table 31: Number and percentage of children who ceased to be looked after during the year, by reason episode ceased, as at 31st March 2014				
Reason	Wirral (No.)	Wirral (%)	North West (%)	England (%)
Total No.	200			
Adopted – application unopposed	0	0	8.7	8.7
Adopted – consent dispensed with	40	20	8.9	7.9
Adopted - Total	40	20	17.6	16.6
Died	0	0	0.2	0.2
Care taken by another LA	-	-	0.7	0.5
Returned to live with parents or relatives	55	27.5	30.8	33.8
Residence Order Granted	15	7.5	5.9	5.6
Special Guardianship order – former foster carer	25	12.5	7.8	5.7
Special Guardianship order – NOT former foster carers	-	-	5.3	5.2
Special Guardianship order – Total	25	12.5	13.1	10.9
Independent Living (with supportive accommodation)	15	7.5	5.5	8.7
Independent Living (without supportive accommodation)	35	17.5	4.6	13.4
Independent Living – Total	50	25	10.1	22.1
Transferred to residential care	0	0	1.4	1.9
Sentenced to custody	-	-	2.1	2.1
Other reasons	15	7.5	18.3	16.3

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Note: Low numbers have been suppressed and are represented by an -. Local figures rounded to the nearest 5, regional and national figures rounded to the nearest 10.

The time taken for children to be adopted from when they come into care is currently being monitored for all local authorities by the Department for Education through the [Adoption Scorecard](#). The longer time period has an impact on the outcomes for the adopted children and on the pressures on resources for children’s social care and associated services for children looked after and the courts.

Comparisons are made against government set targets, the national average and statistical neighbours for a 3 year period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2014. The DfE have also published a [suite of maps](#) contain information on children going through the adoption process and adopters recruited and assessed by local authorities.

For children entering care in Wirral, the average time taken to be matched with potential adopters and moving in with their adoptive family is longer than both national and statistical neighbour averages as Table 32.

Table 32: Time taken for Wirral children to be adopted from when they come into care (average for 3 year period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2014)			
	Wirral	Statistical Neighbours	England
A1 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	687	561	628
A2 - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	220	200	217
A3 - Children who wait less than 20 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family - percentage	42%	47%	51%

Source: DfE Adoption Scorecard and Children in care and adoption performance tables

Note: Wirral’s statistical neighbours are Sefton, Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees, Lancashire, Telford and Wrekin, Bury, St. Helens, Halton, Tameside, Leeds.

[Current services in relation to need \(Children Looked After\)](#)

All children in the care of the local authority have an allocated social worker who is responsible for all care planning and visiting the child on a regular basis. In addition, each child in care has an independent reviewing officer who is responsible for seeking the views of the child, chairing a meeting to review the care plan and to raise any concerns and poor practice.

In addition to social workers, children in care have the support of dedicated Looked after Children nurses to monitor their health needs, a Looked after Children Education Service which monitors educational attainment and Personal Education Planning and a designated teacher in each school. See [JSNA](#) for educational achievement figures. In addition, support is provided to children in care through a variety of cultural and leisure activities.

The care of children is mostly provided by foster carers, who the local authority has a responsibility to recruit, approve and train. In addition, children in care can be placed with independent foster carers or in residential care. In a small number of cases children will be placed with their parents who require ongoing assessment and visits in the same way as when children are placed outside the home.

The large number of children in care puts pressure on social workers to undertake statutory visits and review care plans, independent reviewing officers to review the care plans and associated support services.

There are demands both nationally and locally to recruit sufficient foster carers and the DfE commissioned research in 2012 [Understanding attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering](#) and [The demographic characteristics of foster carers in the UK: Motivations, barriers and messages for recruitment and retention](#) which recommend more targeted recruitment to meet local needs. The Fostering Network estimates that there is a shortage of at least 10,000 foster carers in the UK (Clarke, 2010¹; Tearse, 2010²). The Wirral Fostering Service is also under pressure to recruit and support foster carers in order to meet the needs of the high number of children in care.

¹ Clarke, H. (2010) *Bursting at the Seams: Impact of the Rise of Children Going into Care, 2009-10*. London: The Fostering Network.

² Tearse, M. (2010) *Love Fostering – Need Pay a UK-wide Survey of Foster Carers about Fees*. The Fostering Network available at:

http://www.fostering.net/sites/www.fostering.net/files/public/resources/reports/love_fostering_need_pay_0310.pdf accessed 20/4/12

[Projected service use \(Children Looked After\)](#)

The expectation is that there will be no significant reduction in the need for placements for children in care in the long term and a local sufficiency strategy has been developed which addresses this need and emphasizes recruitment of foster carers. This provides more suitable placements for children in a family setting, nearer their family home and friends (where appropriate) and is the least expensive. The government is also promoting foster care recruitment and making the process for assessment and approval more efficient.

At the same time, Wirral is seeking to reduce the time taken for children to be adopted or become subject to special guardianship. This should have some impact on reducing the number of children in care.

The Family Justice Review and the local implementation of new processes should also reduce the time taken for children to be in court proceedings and decisions to be made about the future permanence plan for a child.

There is however, a national shortage of potential adopters compared to the number of children waiting for adoption. This is being addressed nationally through changes in legislation to make the assessment and approval process more streamlined and through the introduction of the adoption information service – First4Adoption - which signpost potential adopters to appropriate agencies.

See [Further Action on Adoption](#) (published January 2013), Department for Education and [An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay](#) (published in March 2012), Department for Education.

All of the above should reduce the number of children in care, leading to improved health and wellbeing for those no longer in care and ensuring more time and resources are available to improve the outcomes for children in long term care.

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