

Investing in Prevention & Support

Spending on family support, children's centres, young peoples' services, and other forms of help and child welfare interventions in England, 2009-10 to 2021-22

Dr. Calum Webb

Sheffield Methods Institute, the University of Sheffield

c.j.webb@sheffield.ac.uk

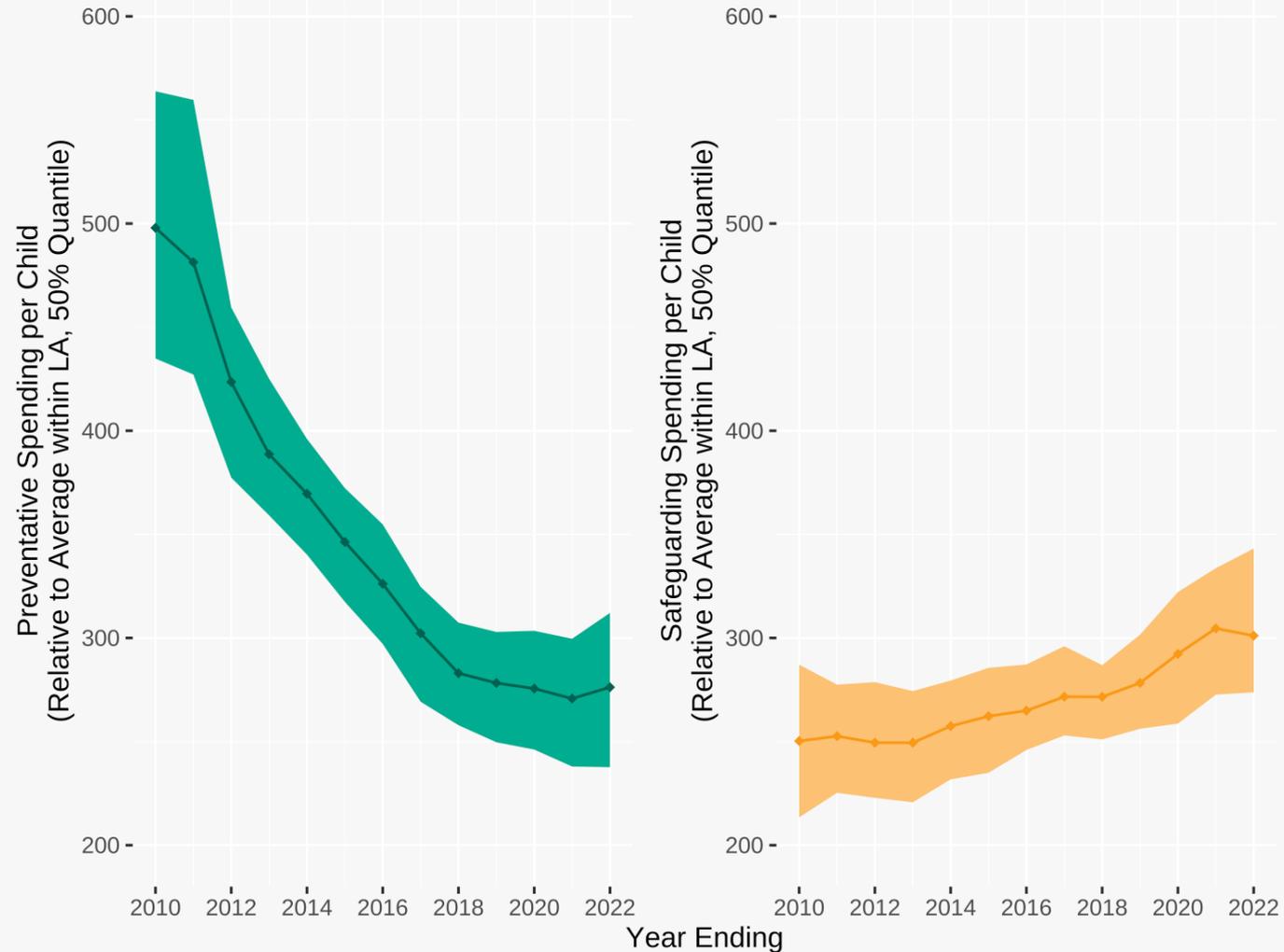
 The
British
Academy

Postdoctoral Fellowship

PF21\210024

Research in Practice Leaders Forum, 5th November 2025



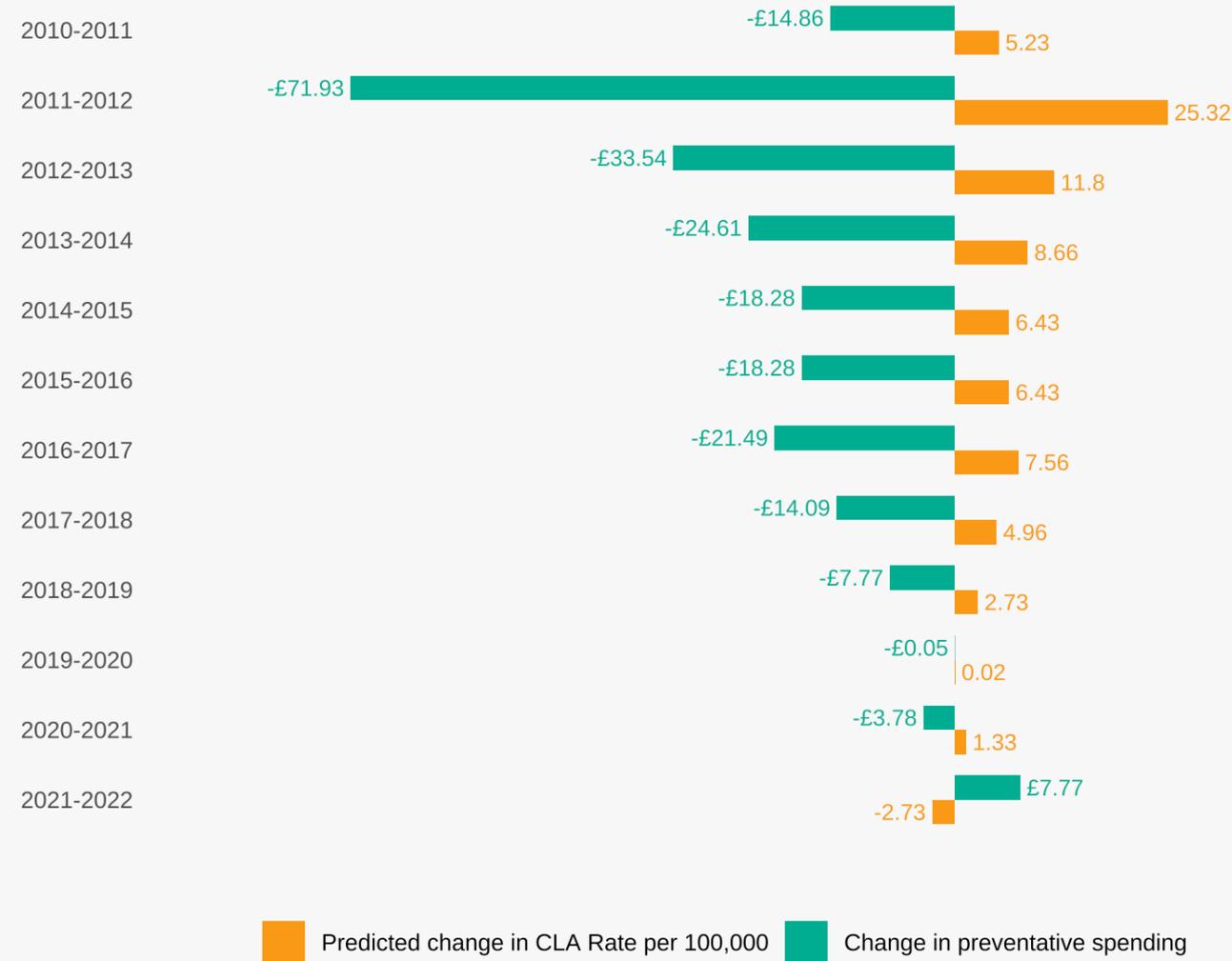


Since 2009-10, spending on preventative children's services has fallen by more than 40% in an average local authority.

Some categories of spending faced much bigger cuts. Sure start & Under 5 decreased by 72.2% and Young Peoples' Services by 66.4%.

Family Support Services (inc. TFP) increased by 34.6% and now makes up 58.1% of all preventative spending (previously 23.3%).



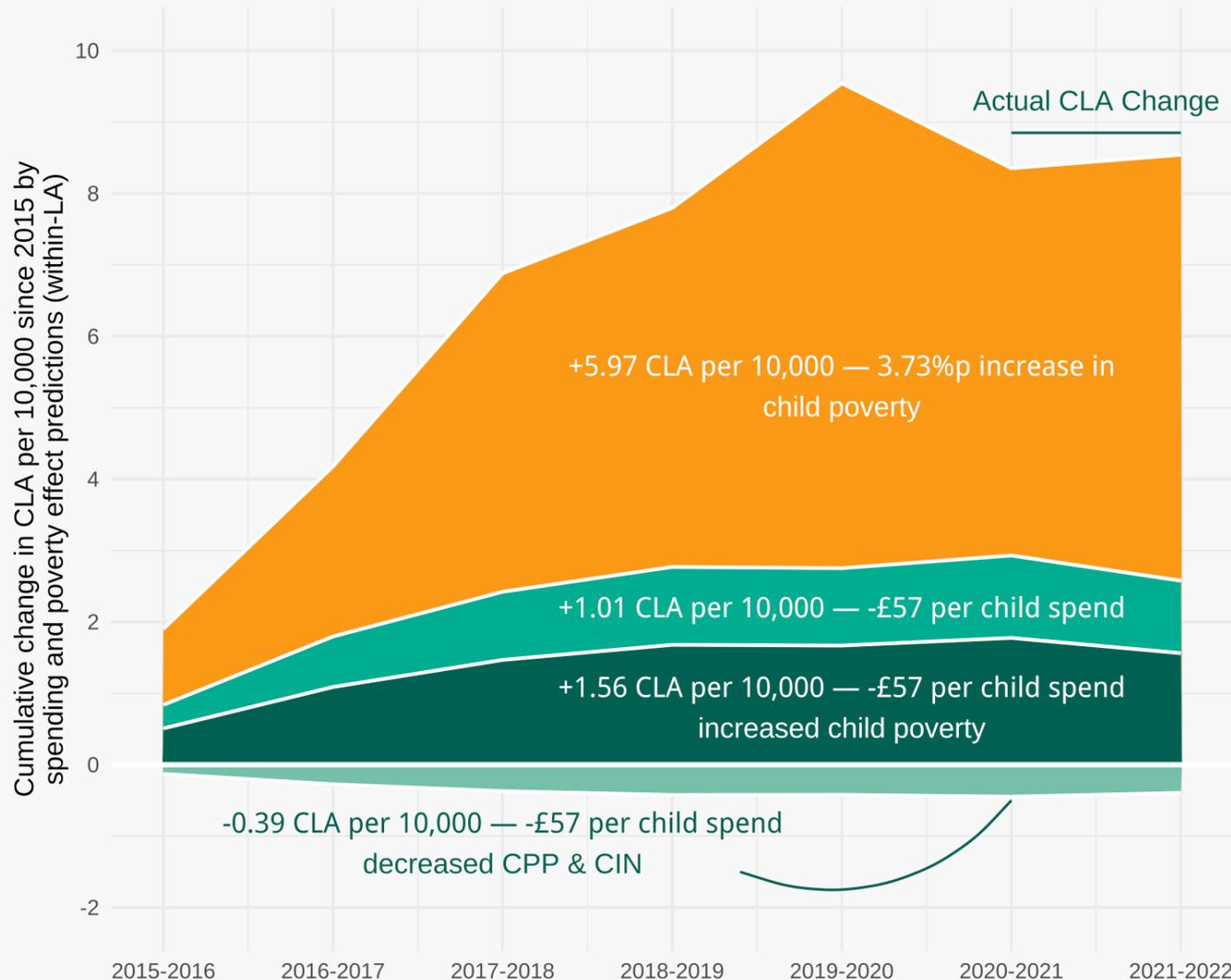


Note: Per 100,000 rate used for comparability of scales

Every £100 per child cut from preventative spending was associated with 3.5 more children in care per 10,000 and 2 more children placed on Child Protection Plans per 10,000 over the following two years.

The average local authority cut £212 per child in spending on these services. Each £1 cut is associated with £2.70 of additional costs linked to child poverty, care, mental health, and criminal justice outcomes.





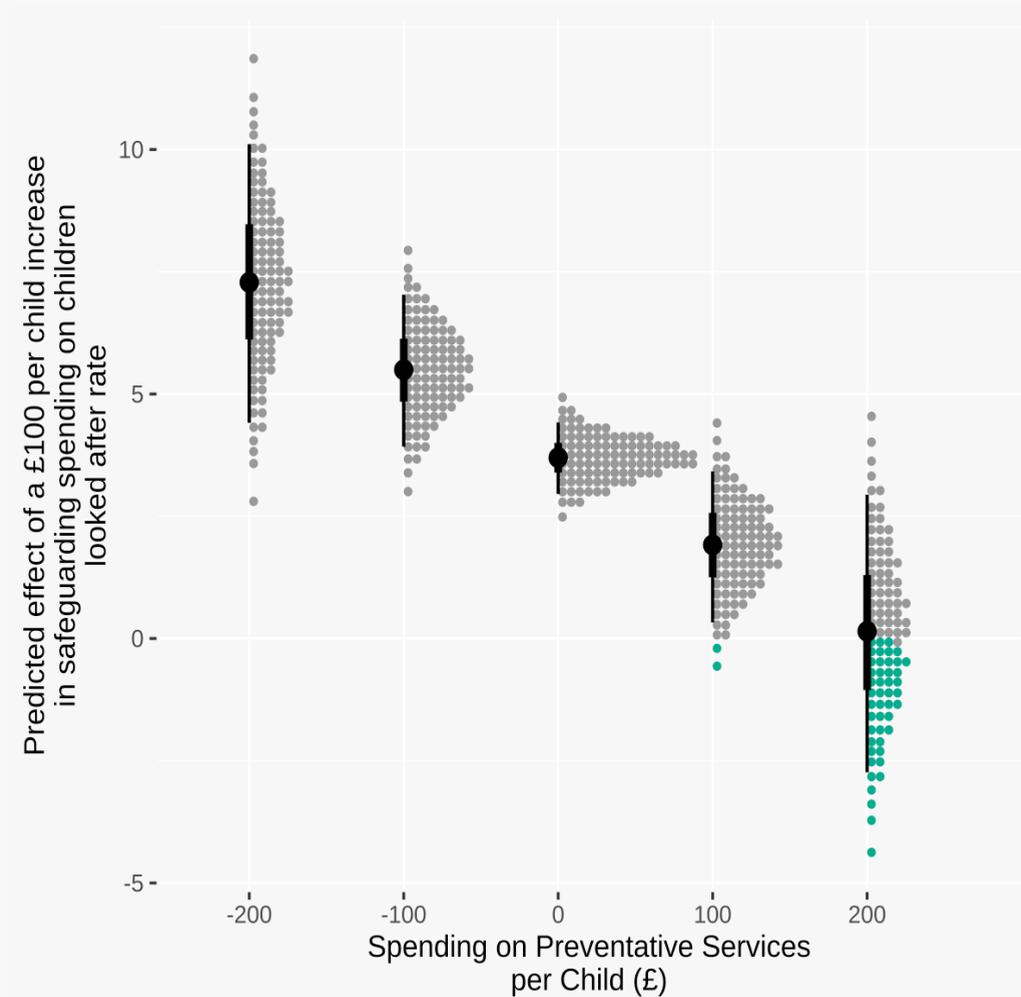
Increases in child poverty remain the largest contributor of increasing rates of children in care (around 2/3rds of the average increase a local authority has seen).

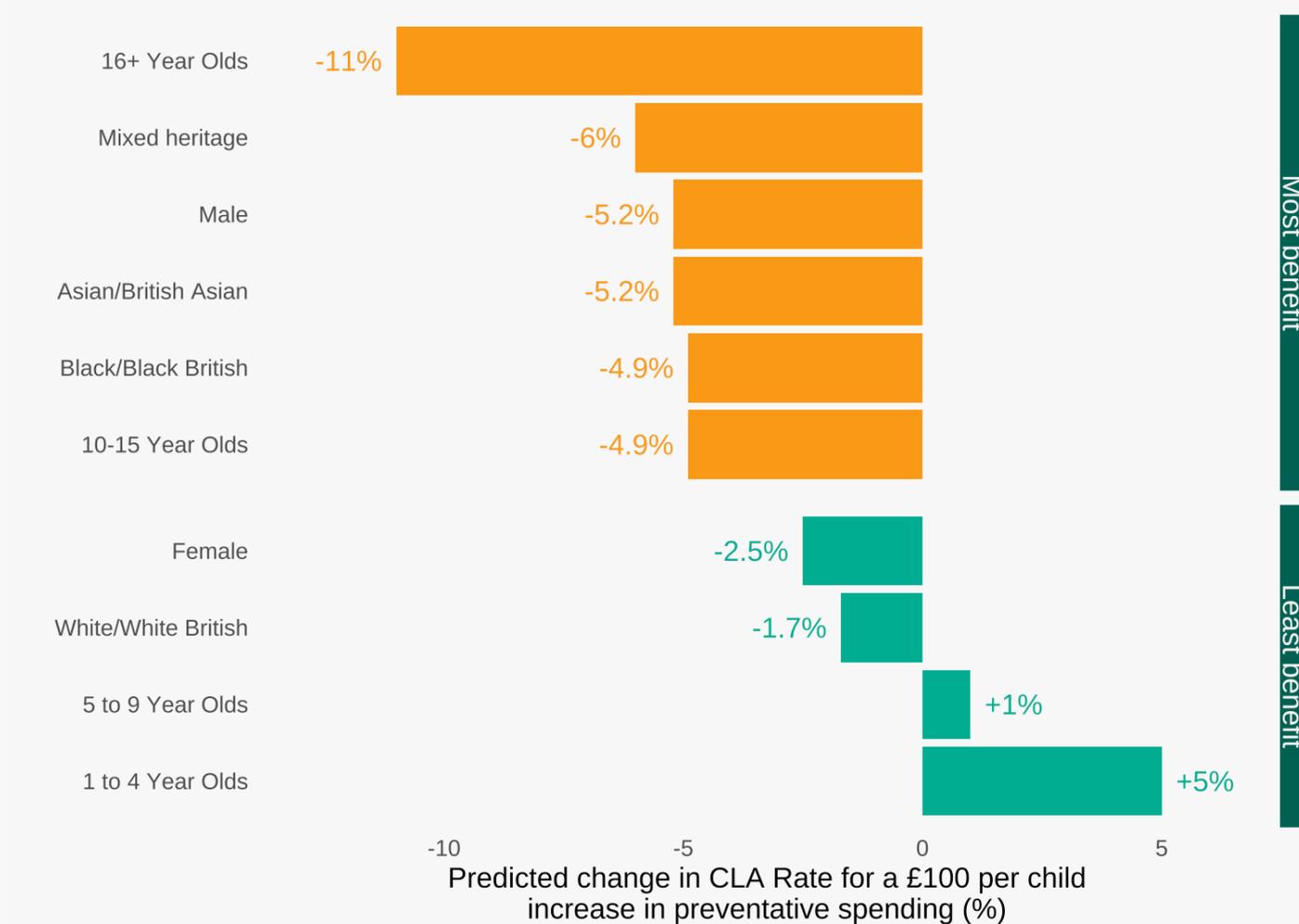
Cuts to preventative services were linked to increased rates of child poverty, which then contributed to higher rates of children in care. This may be because these services offer childcare (e.g. youth clubs) that can increase employment opportunities for parents.



When spending on preventative services is low, more spending on safeguarding services tended to lead to increased rates of children in care.

Social workers need a well-resourced family support environment in order to find alternatives to social care.



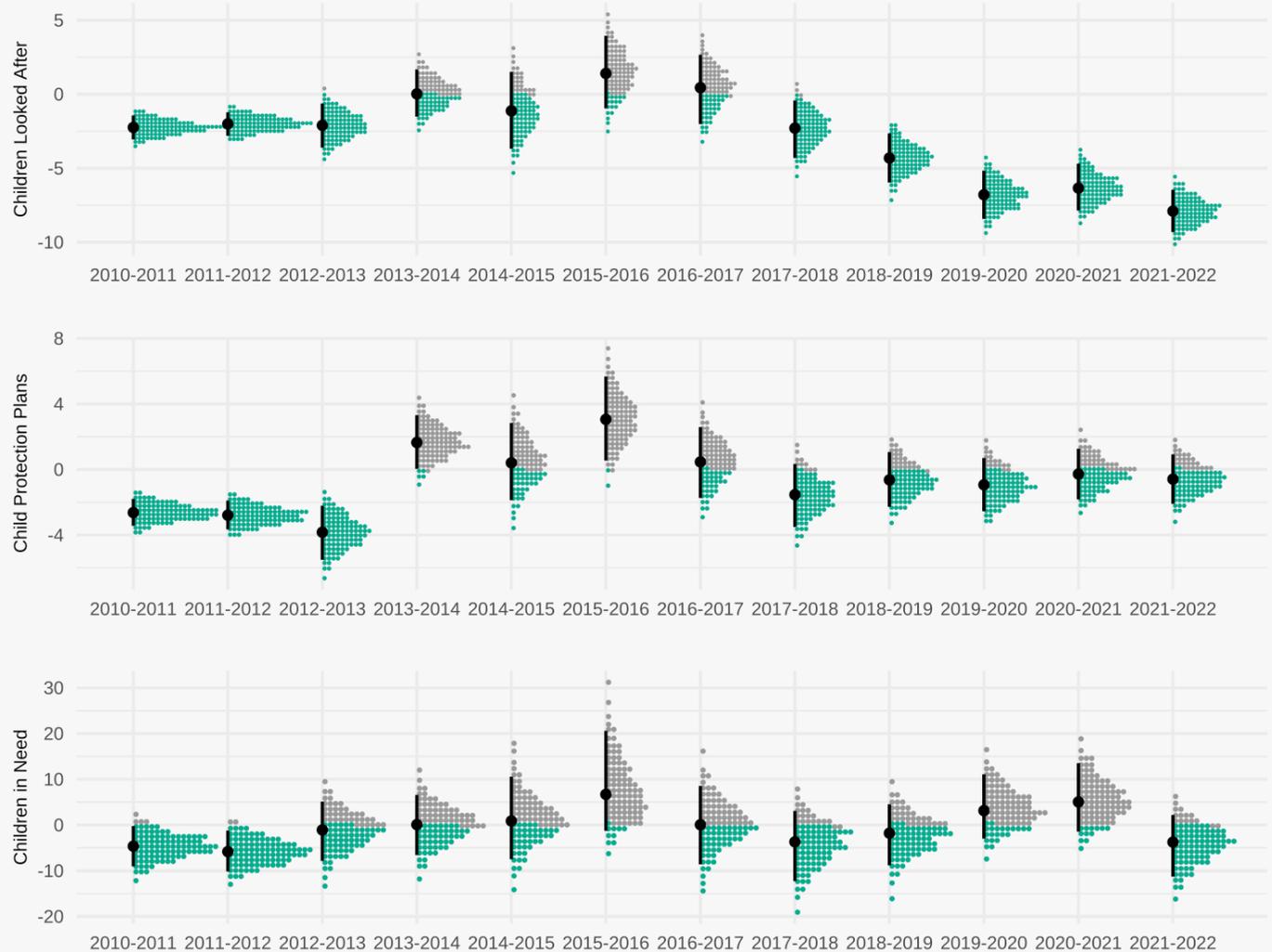


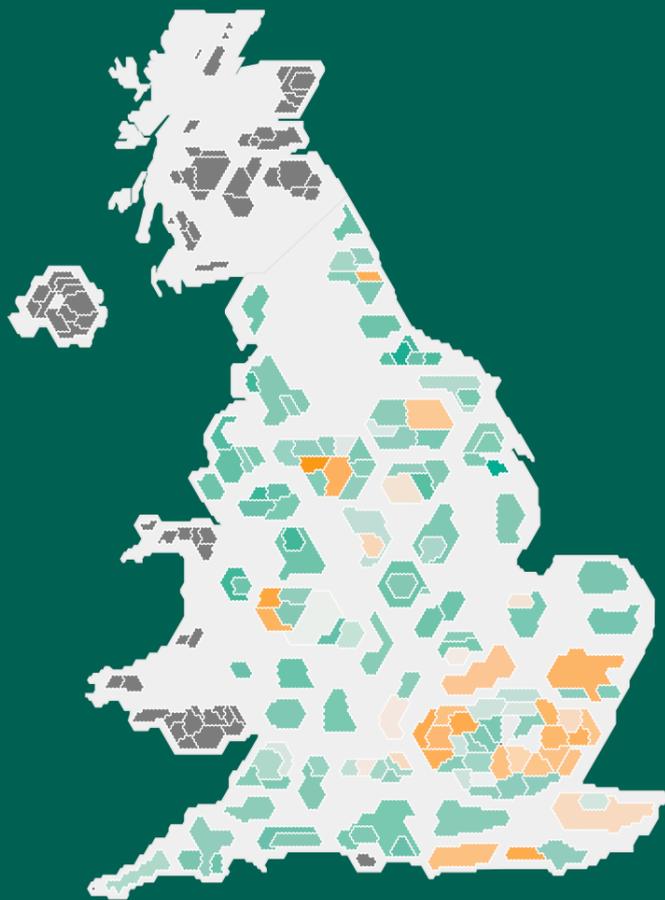
The consequences of cuts to spending have not impacted all children equally. Older children, boys and young men, and children with Mixed Heritage, Black/Black British, and Asian/British Asian backgrounds have been most impacted.

By contrast, some groups of children tend to enter care *more* often when spending is higher, particularly 1-4 year olds.

Preventative spending has gotten better at reducing rates of children in care, but worse at reducing rates of children on child protection plans or in need.

The effects of spending have also become more variable since the funding formula change of 2012-13, meaning the impact of spending depends more on where you happen to live than it did before.





Predicted CLA rate change for £100 per child increase
in early help & family support services



While increased spending on family support is predicted to decrease rates of children in care in most local authorities, this isn't necessarily the case everywhere.

In 76.8% of local authorities, we would expect an increase in spending on preventative services to result in a decrease in children looked after rate over two years.



To read the full report: ipse.calumwebb.co.uk

