

Report to: **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **8 March 2010**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Title of report: **Safeguarding Children – Member and Senior Management oversight**
Purpose of report: **Update report on the increased trends on the number of child protection referrals and care proceedings**

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is recommended to note the increases in child protection activity within East Sussex and to endorse the actions being taken in response.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The significant increase in activity for Child Protection related services has resulted in major budget pressures with an over-spend of £1,000,000 in 2009/10 and pressures of £1,500,000 in 2010/11.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 An update report was requested in September 2009 on the increased trends on the number of referrals and care proceedings the department is managing and the impact this is having on staff and budgets. Detailed information about increase work trends is attached as **Appendix 1** and the commentary below explains their impact. Comparative data with other local authorities in the south-east from July 2009 is attached as **Appendix 2**

2.2 The increase in child protection work started before baby P but then accelerated and has sustained with no sign of plateau. There have been increased referrals from police, schools, health and the general public. The increase in contacts and referrals has been sustained and shows no signs of abating. These have been 'real' and justified referrals – not over cautious or risk adverse practice by social workers. The conversion of referrals into increased Initial Assessments, Child Protection Plans, Court Proceedings and Looked After Children demonstrates this. There is no evidence of lowered thresholds to influence this trend, and although there may be a greater tendency to put more cases before the Court for decision, there is no evidence of lowered thresholds for orders in the Family Court.

2.3 The data attached in **Appendix 1** shows an increase in Contacts and Referrals from 4,348 in July 2008 to 12,609 in November 2009 with 70% of contacts and referrals relating to 0-11 year-olds. There has also been a proportionate increase in initial assessments from 2,964 in July 2008 to 4,191 in Nov 2009. There was a 10% increase between July and November 2008 and then a further 30% increase from Nov 2008 to Nov 2009 this is consistent with most other Local Authorities in the South-East who have seen an average increase of 20%. During this time the conversion rate from referral to initial assessment has remained fairly consistent. This has required that additional resources are put into 0-11 Duty and Assessment Teams to respond to the increased work. Specifically there have been increases in the numbers of social workers in the duty teams as well as two additional Practice Managers in those teams.

2.4 There have been similar increases in the numbers of children with Child Protection Plans which have increased from 373 in July 2008 to 524 in November 2009, this is a 31% increase between November 2008 and November 2009 (40% increase since July 2008). This creates significant additional demands on social work teams to meet its associated statutory requirements. There has been an increase from an average of 15 sets of proceedings per quarter before 'baby Peter' to an average of 20 sets of proceedings from January 2009; as the increase in children with Child Protection Plans is followed by court action. This increase in care proceedings activity is currently impacting on the workload for the Family Support Teams and as the proceedings progress they are impacting on the budget and bring pressure on to the Looked After Children teams. At the beginning of 2009 it was anticipated that there would be 65 sets of proceedings for the full year but

this estimate has been revised upwards to 80 sets of proceedings for the year. This has been combined with the implementation of the Public Law Outline (a new set of court procedures) which has greatly increased demand for social workers in Court, Court Reports and Assessments, and particularly Court-Directed Assessments and Placements (e.g. for mother and baby assessments and greatly increased supervised contact orders).

2.5 There has been a 7% increase in the number of looked after children from 443 in March 2008 to 464 in March 2009 and 478 in September 2009. The number of looked after children in East Sussex is at its highest for 6 years. The increase has not been as steep as other local authorities and it is thought that this is because of the policy in East Sussex of supporting family and friends carers using section 17 allowances and assisting families to obtain residence orders and special guardianship with no detriment to the family rather than requiring the Local Authority to have parental responsibility. There have also been significant increases in applications for residence orders and special guardianship orders. This brings with it financial pressures. While this percentage increase is currently lower than other indicators, this is partly due to the time lag which will inevitably occur in some cases between child protection and looked after interventions. The increases in child protection plans and cases in proceedings all point to a larger percentage increase in the number of looked after children in 2010.

2.6 The effect of the increased child protection work on staffing has been significant with increased workloads and a need for extra staff. It has been difficult to recruit sufficient additional staff because of national shortages of appropriately qualified staff. A variety of mechanisms have been explored to address this problem including use of agency staff to undertake assessments work, use of interim staff to fill vacancies in the short-term and recruitment abroad to fill vacancies permanently. Most recently there has been a trip to Canada which resulted in offers being made to 11 qualified social workers (including some with ten years of previous experience) who it is hoped will start working for East Sussex between March and June 2010.

2.7 The pressures being experienced in East Sussex are being replicated by most authorities in the South-East as is evidenced in the tables attached as **Appendix 2**. These pressures have been reported to central government with a request for additional funding to be identified in order to assist Local Authorities respond to these unprecedented pressures. To date there has been no definitive response to these requests although the additional pressures have been noted.

3 Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1 There has been a significant increase in all aspects of child protection work within East Sussex which has placed significant pressure on staff and budgets. This increase is reflected across comparative authorities in the South-East and representation is being made to national government for additional resources to respond to the unprecedented increase in work.

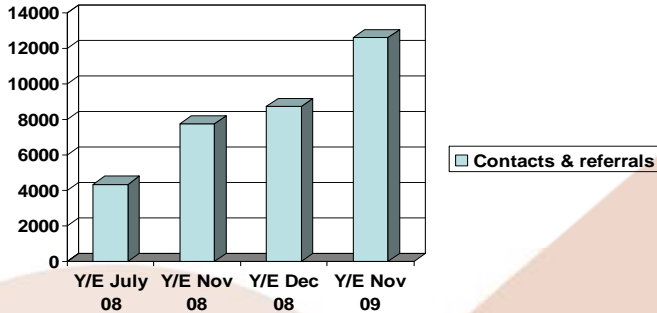
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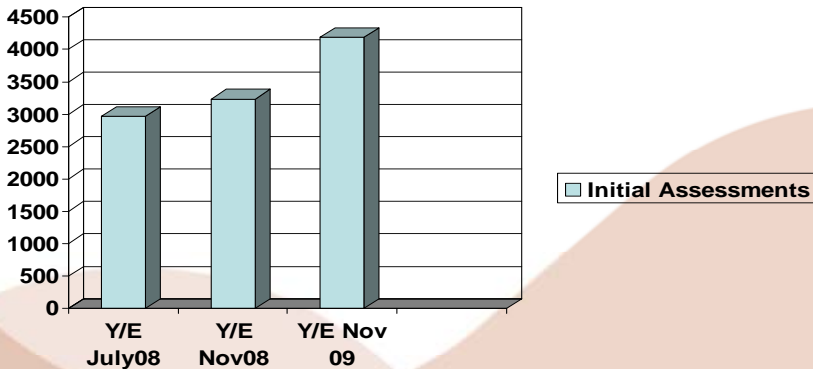
Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

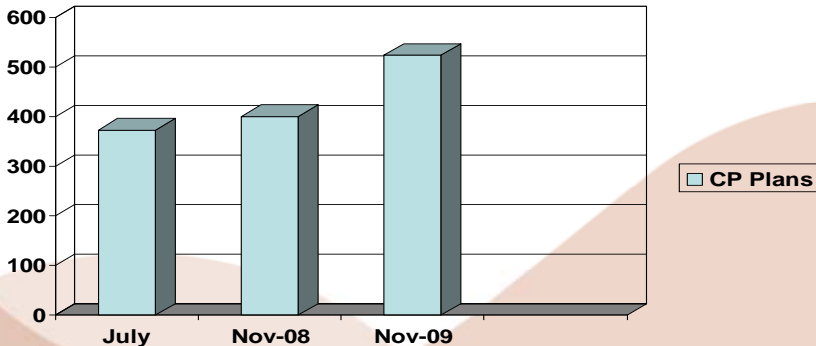
Contacts and Referrals Activity



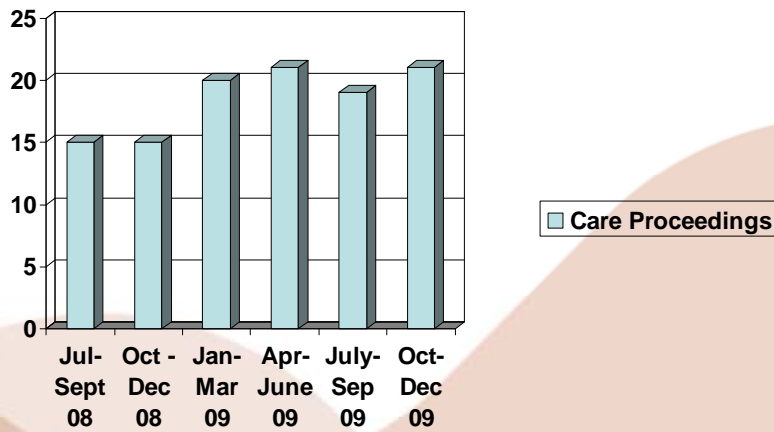
Initial Assessment Activity



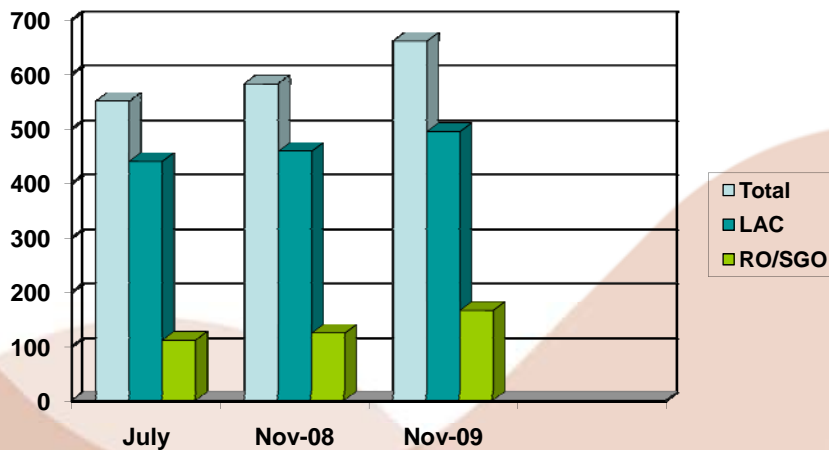
Child protection plans -snapshot



Care proceedings - initiated

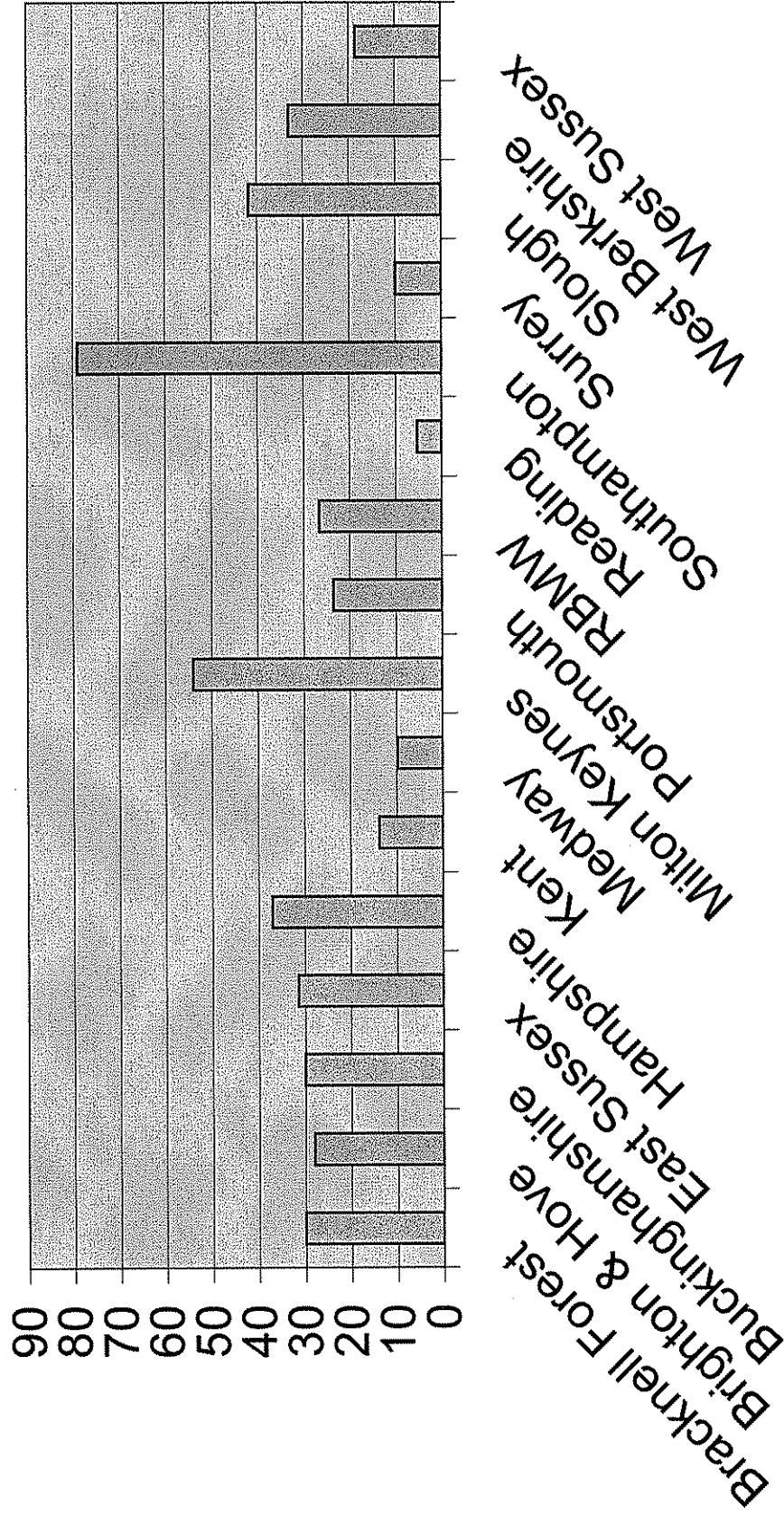


Looked After Children & Residence/ Special Guardianship Orders snapshot



South East Region - Percentage Increase in Child Protection Plans

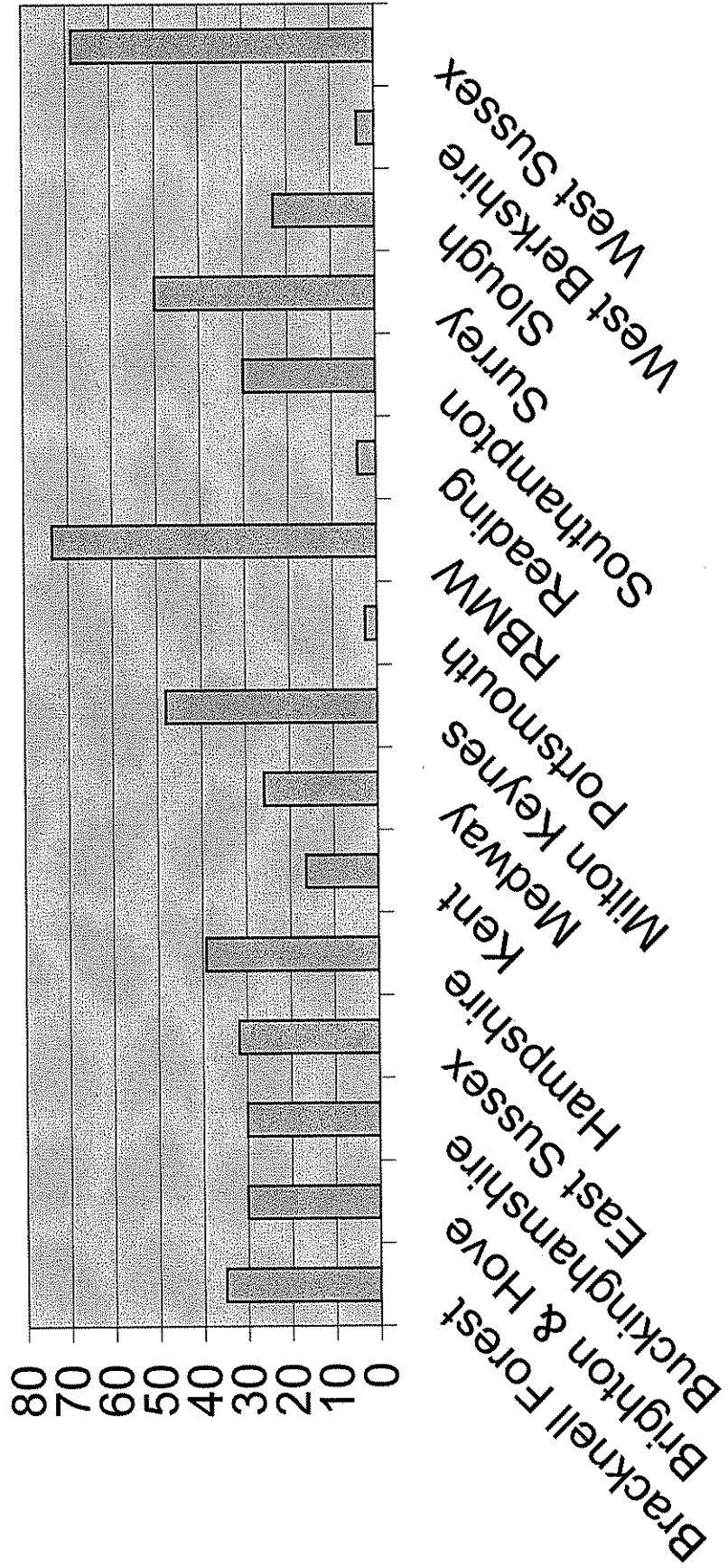
Percentage Increase % July 08 to July 09



Name of Authority

South East Region - Percentage Increase in Referrals and Contacts

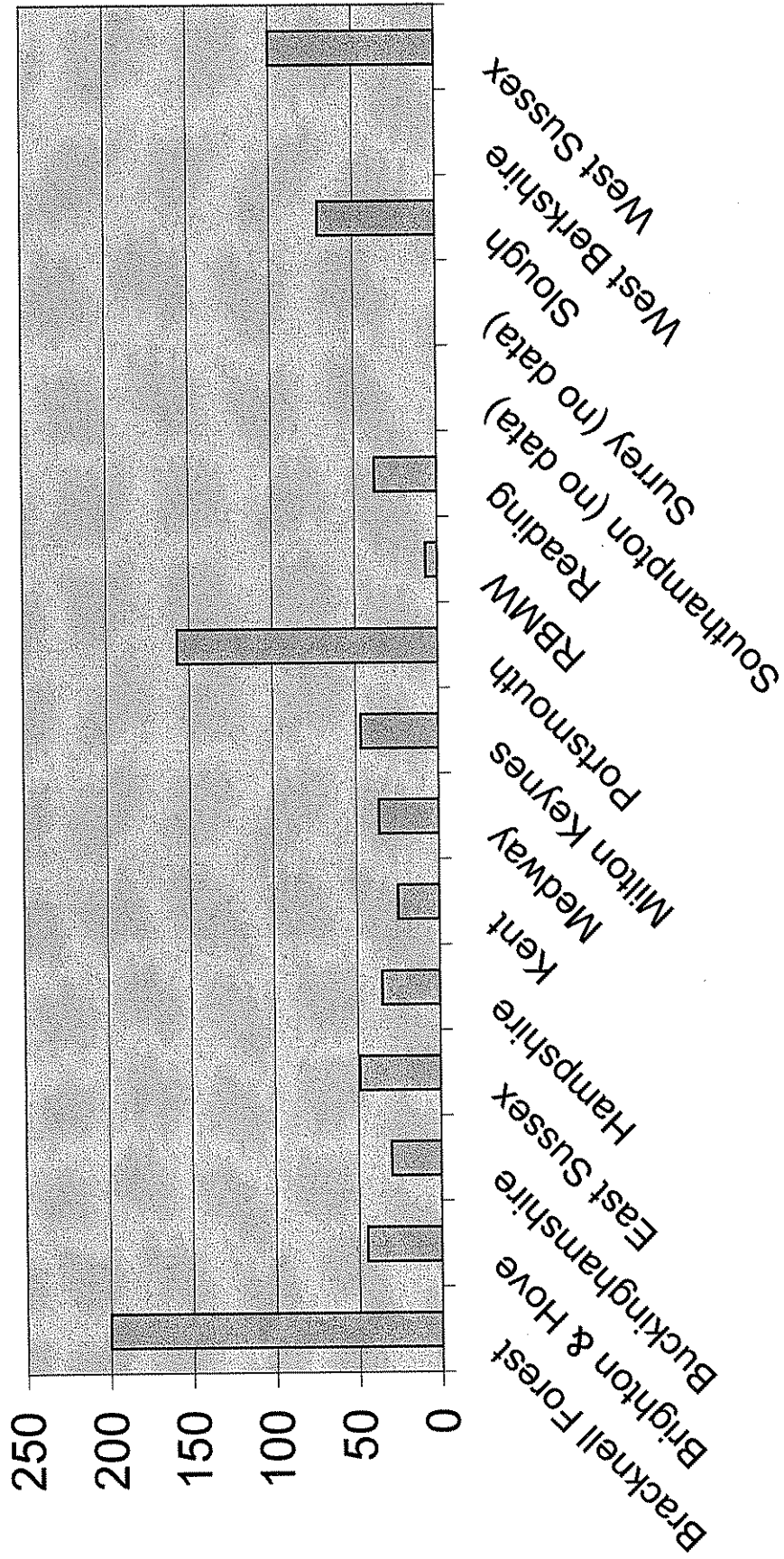
Percentage Increase % July 08 to July 09



Name of Authority

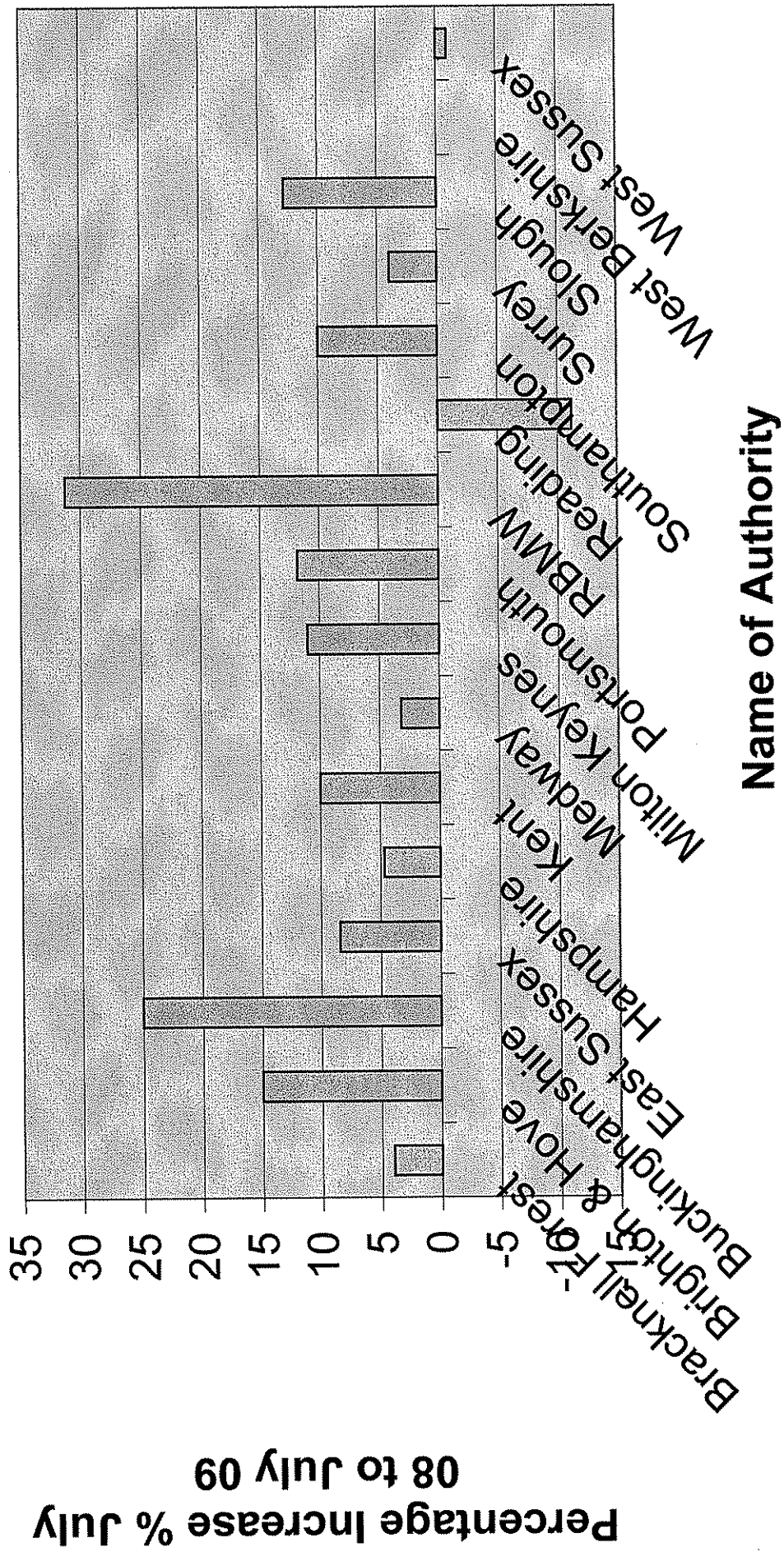
South East Region - Court Proceedings

Percentage Increase % July
08 to July 09



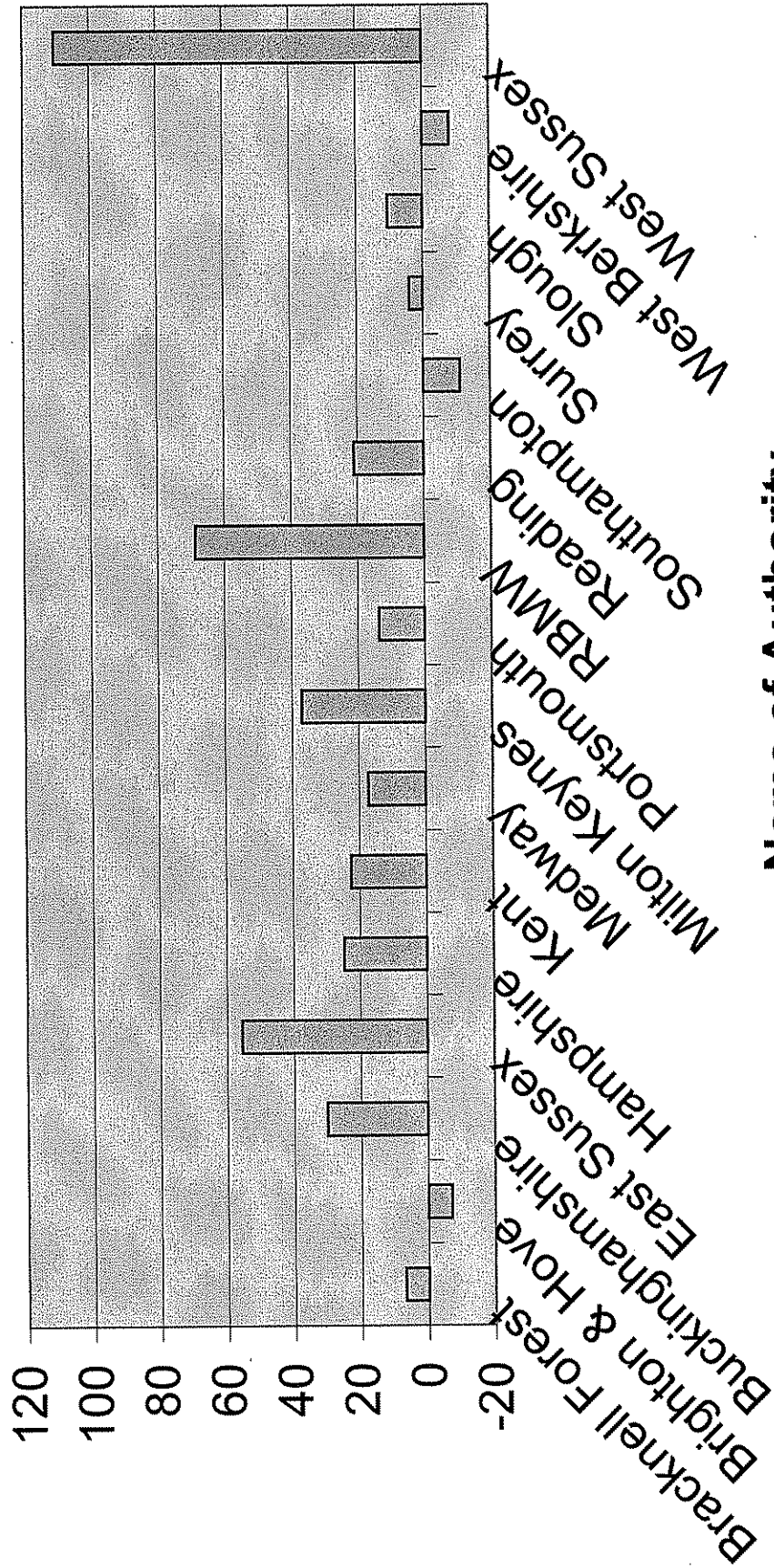
Name of Authority

South East Region - Percentage Increase in LAC



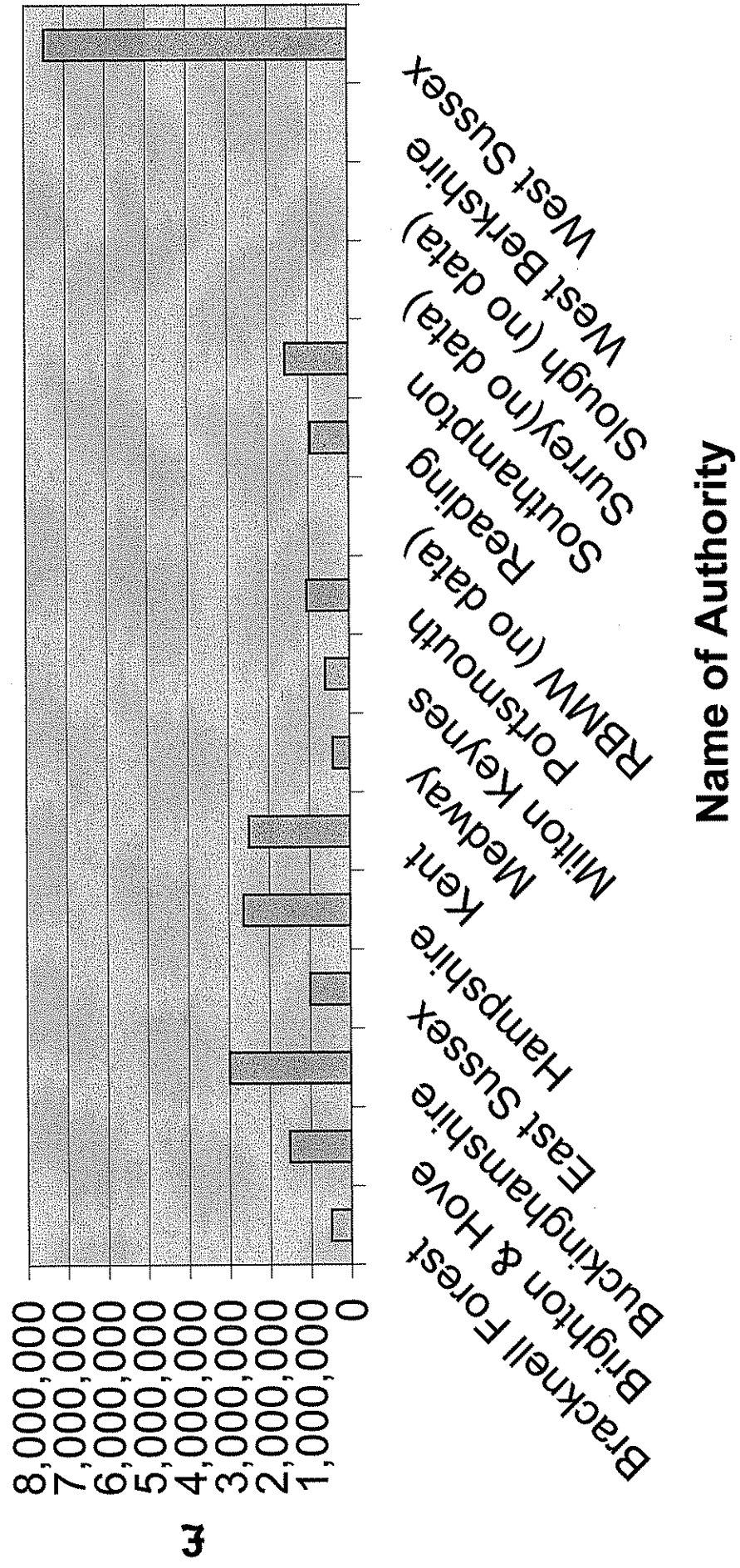
South East Region - Percentage Increase in Initial Assessments

Percentage Increase % July 08 to July 09



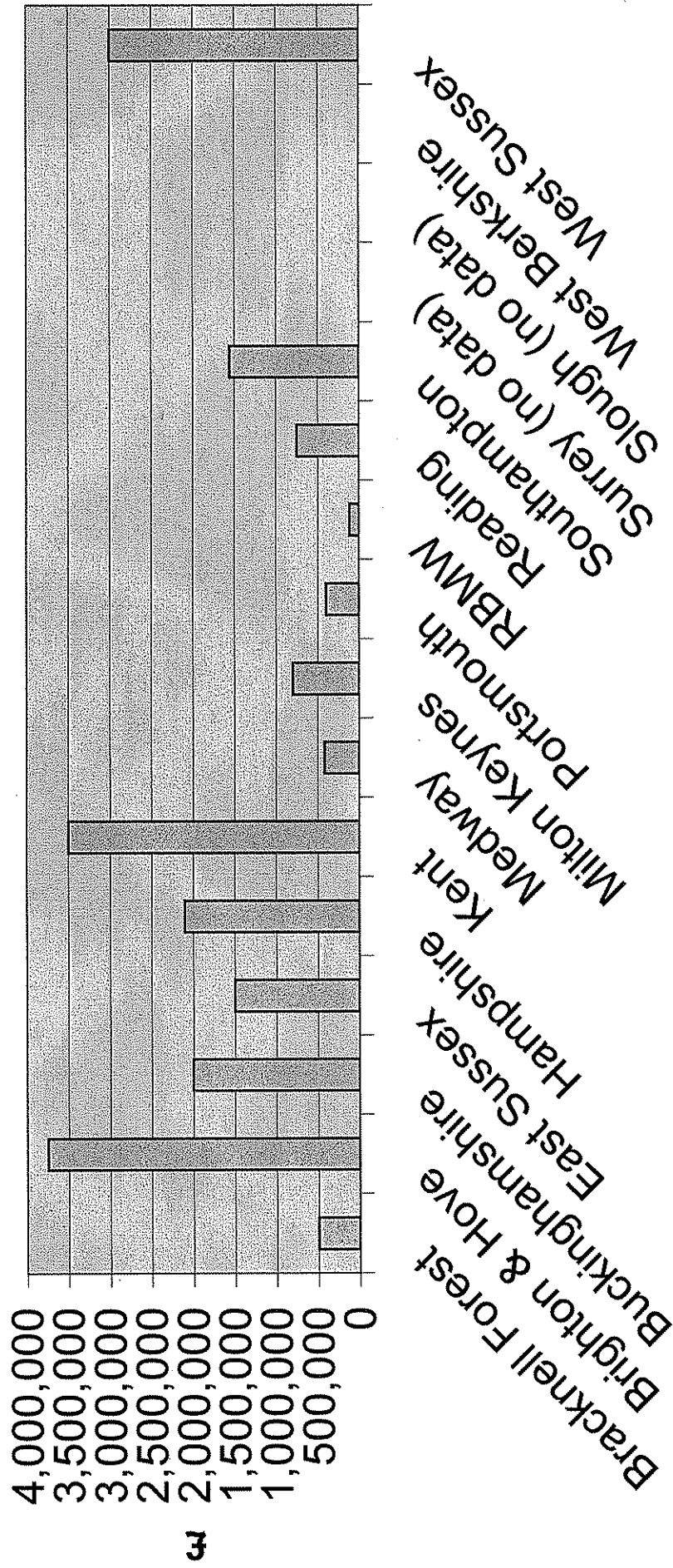
Name of Authority

South East region - expected Child Protection overspend 2009/10 £



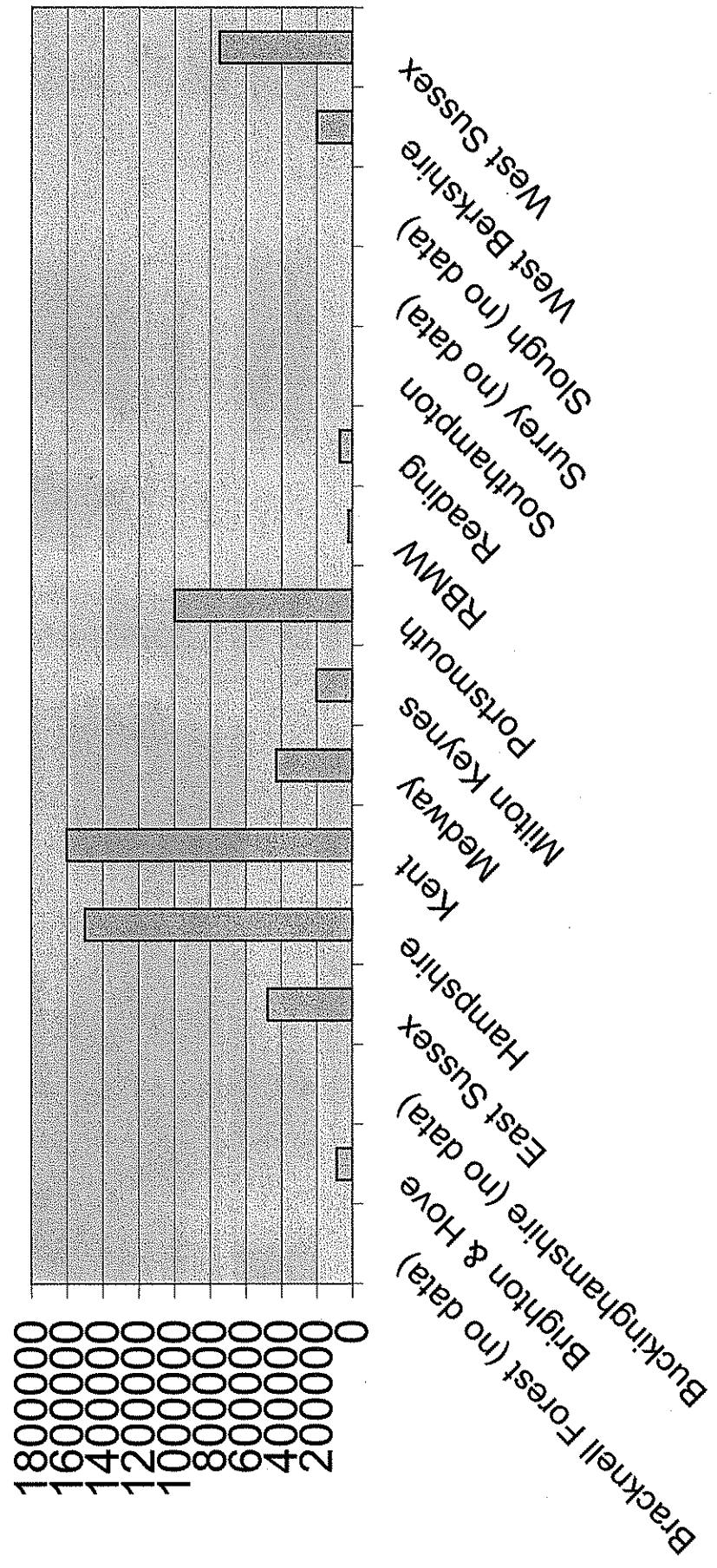
Name of Authority

South East Region - Expected Child Protection pressures for 2010/11 £



Name of Authority

South East Region - Southwark Judgement Expected pressure (where known) £



Name of Authority

£