

## Appendix 1

### Long Term Stability of Southwark Children in Care

**Author:** Alasdair Smith, Service Manager CLA 0-12 Service

**Date of Report:** 2011-01-28

**Introduction:** This report considers reviews performance around the *long term stability* of LAC as defined by the DoE indicator N63. It is a difficult indicator to effect given its long term nature. 100% performance is not desired. Placement changes are inevitable and in some cases desirable however the key is to minimise the number of changes children experience and to understand better the characteristics of children who the care system is unable to keep stable. Secure attachments in early life are an essential ingredient of normal child development. Placement instability compromises this and negatively effects emotional functioning, behaviour, education and identity. It has long term consequences for employment, social relationships, financial management and housing<sup>1</sup>.

**Definition:** “The percentage of looked after children aged under 16 at 31 March who had been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement together last for at least 2 years”. The definition of this indicator has remained fairly consistent over several years which enables some longitudinal comparisons.

#### Overall performance figures:

	Nov 2006	March 2009	Jan 2011
LAC Total	635	530	522
LAC over 2.5 yrs	220 (35%)	186 (35%)	142 (27%)
Same place 2 yrs - <b>stable</b>	135	130	108
Not same 2 yrs - <b>unstable</b>	79	56	34
N63	<b>61%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>76%</b>

**Summary:** There has been significant improvement in the performance in this area. It is not possible to identify any one factor that has made a difference. Likely influences are:

- continued investment in skilled and responsive multi-agency work to support the social work and fostering role (Carelink and LAC Education Team);
- consolidation of improved structures to focus on age groups of LAC (CLA 0-12 Service and AAC); increased awareness across the system of issues relating to stability;
- renewed focus on permanence tracking;
- continuing strong fostering support service.

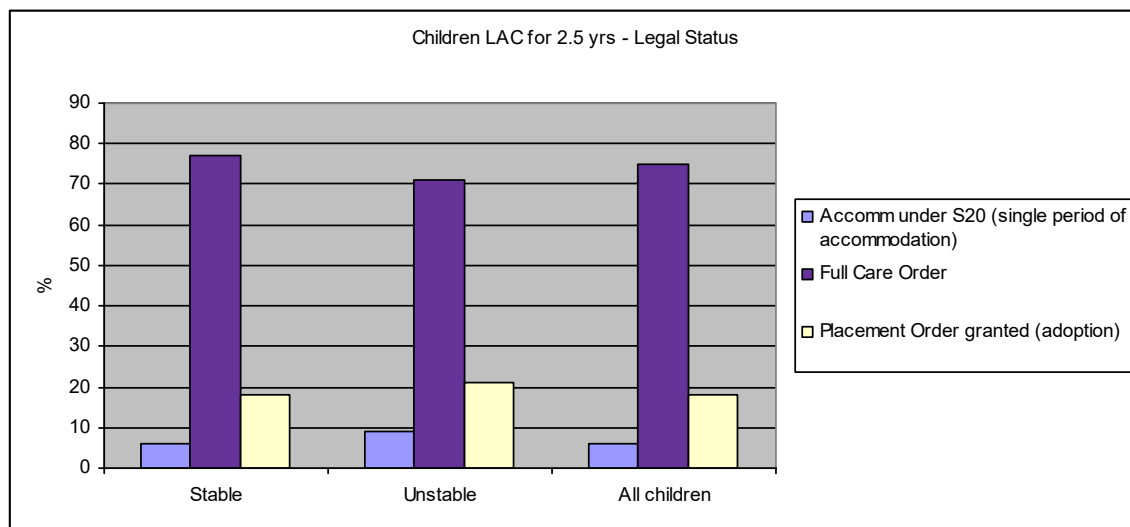
---

<sup>1</sup> Placement Stability – a review of the literature Emily R. Munro and Ainsley Hardy (University of Loughborough 2007)

Unstable LAC are more likely to enter the care system later and particularly they are more likely to have decisions finalised by a court about their future care significantly later than stable children. The great majority of these children are known to the care system under the age of 8 yrs old and will have legal orders (Care or Placement) in respect of them. Unstable LAC need considerably more intervention from Education and CAMHS and are in more expensive care placements. Only a small number of unstable LAC experience unplanned changes of placement. Significantly more undergo planned moves to enable their needs to be better met elsewhere.

Unstable LAC are children we know very well and so: understanding their needs better; planning for their care more rigorously; and learning how to manage their often complex difficulties is a continuing challenge.

### Legal Status:



### Age:

	Current age	Mean age when child first becomes looked after	Mean age when Care Proceedings end if relevant
All children	11yrs 2mths	4yrs 7mths	6yrs 4 mths
Stable	11yrs 4mths	4yrs 4 mths	5yrs 6 mths
Unstable	10yrs 3mths	5yrs 4 mths	8yrs 3 mths

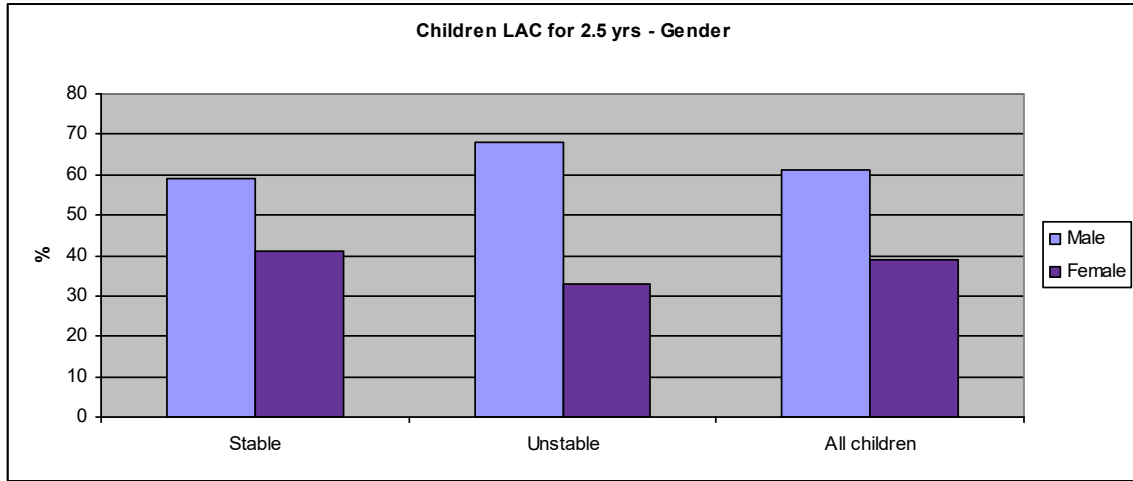
### Ages children became looked after

Age	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Stable	15	10	6	14	12	12	13	8	6	3	3	2	4		108
Unstable	6	3	2	2	3	2	4	4		3	2	2		1	34
Total	21	13	8	16	15	14	17	12	6	6	5	4	4	1	142

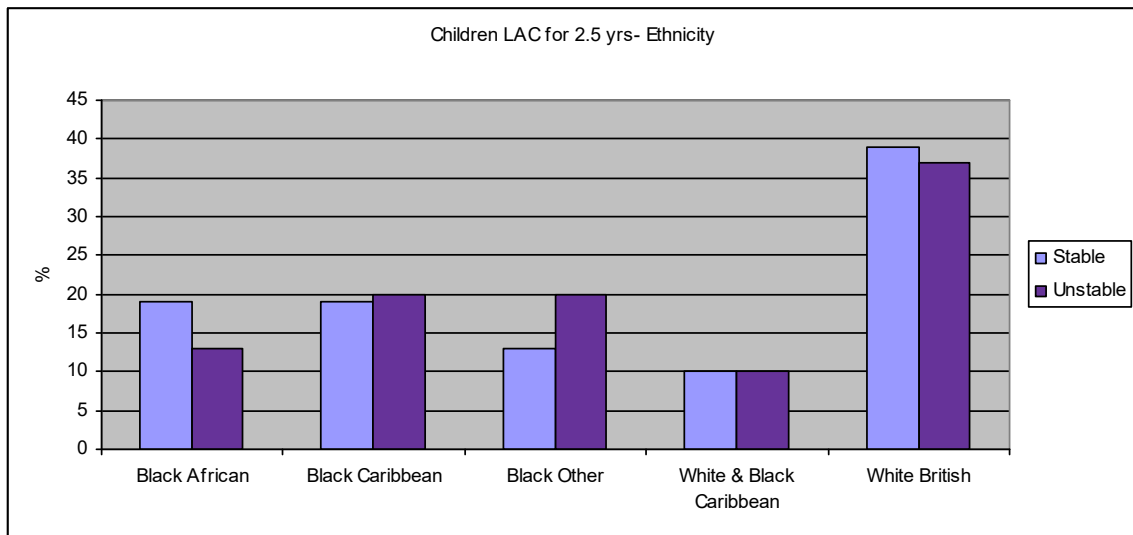
### Age care proceedings ceased excluding children placed for adoption

Age	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Stable	5	9	5	9	6	11	13	18	12	4	5	3	1	1	102
Unstable	1	1	3	2	1	3	3	2	4	1	3	1		2	27
Total	6	10	8	11	7	14	16	20	16	5	8	4	1	3	129

**Gender:**



**Ethnicity**

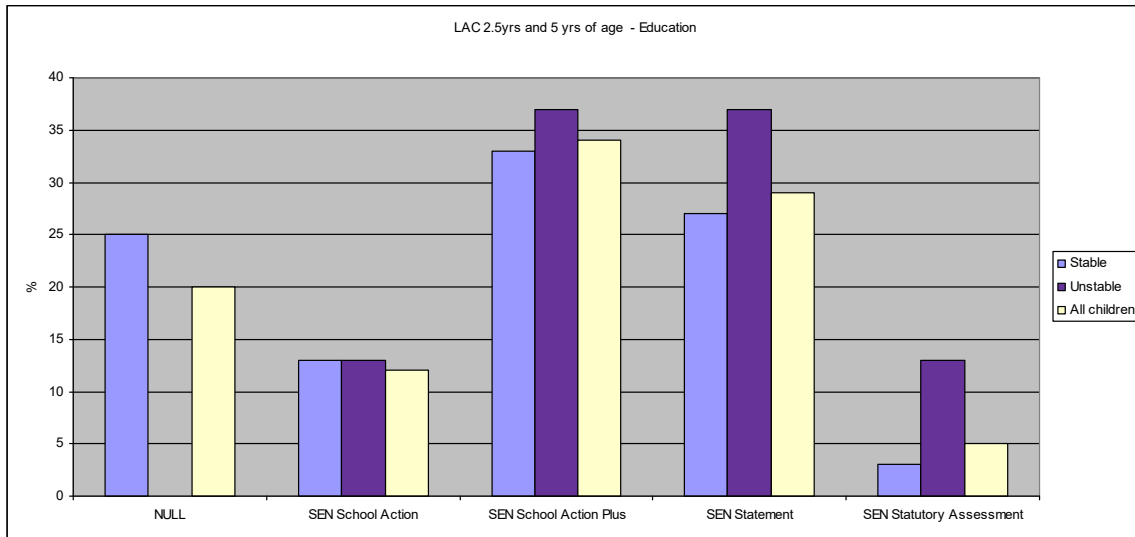


Black other children seem to be disproportionately in the unstable group. Black African children seem to be more likely to be in stable placements.

## Disability:

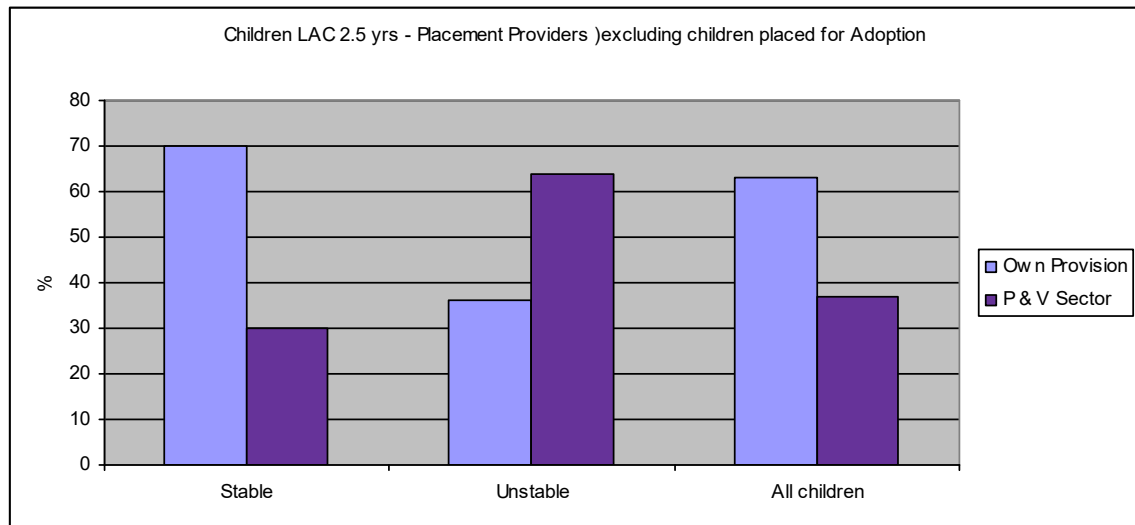
Children with disabilities are much more likely to be in stable placements. Of eight children with disabilities looked after for more than 2 ½ years only one is in an unstable placement.

## Education:



Unstable children have significantly higher educational needs. They require significantly more intervention within their schools. All children in the unstable group are on a minimum of School Action Plus indicating a higher awareness in the school setting of the needs of the child and strategies / assessments to promote his or her needs.

## Placement providers:



Unstable children are far more likely to be in Private and Voluntary sector placements. The costs of these are considerable compared to in house fostering resources. 5 of the 18 children in this category in the unstable group were in residential care and none of these were joint funded with Southwark Education.

### **Unstable Group:**

**Planned changes** - 18 children (53%) had planned placement moves: mostly to long term foster care (7) residential care (4), to another foster carer but not long term (2) to a family member (1) Adoption (4). In April 2009 this proportion was 36% so this has shown some improvement.

**Unplanned changes (disruptions)** - 11 children (32%). The main reasons for moves were the behavior of the child (8) of these 2 involved offending. A minority appeared to be purely issues with both carer and child (2). 1 seemed to involve the undermining of the placement by the parent. Child behaviour issues may mask underlying issues relating to: inadequate matching (may or may not have been predictable); inadequate care; carer not equipped/supported to manage changing needs of a child (offending/gangs); inadequate service provision (CAMHS, social work, educational support) Only an audit of this group will be able to understand the issue around placement disruption. In April 2009 the proportion was 56% so the decrease in unplanned changes is positive.

**Unavoidable changes** - 5 (15%) children changed placements due to reasons beyond control. 4 of the children had foster carers who ceased fostering for a variety of reasons (retirement, family tragedy, divorce). 1 moved following decisions of child protection strategy meetings. This proportion was 9% last time.

### **Audits:**

2 audits undertaken by the Fostering Service and CLA 0-12 Service have thrown some light on social work practice in this area that has led to a number of actions. In the Disruptions Audit undertaken by the Fostering Service, of the 19 cases looked at, 8 disruptions were judged unavoidable. Boys were significantly in the majority and better training of foster carers around specific issues were identified as well as raising awareness of the need to improve processes around the potential disruption of placements for all professionals.

In the CLA 0-12 Audit of Children in Long Term Foster care it was recognised that the understanding of the needs of this group of children needed better analysis. The focus on matching needed to improve and a plan to develop a better practice and service wide awareness of this to take account of children's needs was instigated.

### **Considerations:**

Since last reviewing this group in detail in April 2009 it is clear that there have been significant improvements across the system in delivering more stable placements for LAC. Of note is the overall increase in the proportion of stable placements, and within the unstable group an increase in the amount of planned placement news and reduction in the number of unplanned moves.

In respect of equalities it is notable that children with disabilities are particularly likely to have a stable placement. The proportion of boys who experience an unstable placement as opposed to a stable placement is significantly higher and it is also notable that the black other group is also higher in the unstable group.

Following the JAR in 2008 and reviews of unstable placements in Oct 2008 and April 2009 considerable awareness was promoted across the system to improve the multi-agency working to support stability. A long-term stability working group was established under the leadership of Assistant Director Rory Patterson, and CLA Management Days and Service Days focused learning and understanding of the topic. There was no *lightning bolt* intervention or strategy that made a difference. The work focused on continuing to work along the 4 key principles established by Jane Held's research, commissioned by the DFE'S entitled '**Qualitative study: The Placement stability of looked after children**' published in 2005 and subsequently endorsed by the DCFS commissioned literature review as articulating the key approach to working to deliver sustained improvement in placement stability.

**1) effective diversion from care and early intervention:** since April 2009 the LAC population saw a considerable increase particularly following the publicity surrounding the death of Baby Peter. This placed considerable strain on the system and we are only now seeing the numbers of care proceedings starting to drop. In July 2010, the Assessment and Safeguarding Services (Sumner House) introduced a S.20 panel which is multi-agency and seeks to look rigorously at the needs of older children who may be at risk of entering the care system. This will support long-term stability by enabling resources within the care system to be focused on younger children in care to enable better outcomes to be delivered for them.

The Legal Planning Panel meets twice a month to plan for children entering the care system through Care Proceedings. This is a well established function (since September 2006) overseen by established Service Managers. The CLA 0-12 Service Manager attends all such meetings to enable good joined up planning at an early stage. It is notable that the findings of this study show that children whose legal permanence is finalised later are less likely to achieve stability in placement, it is therefore crucial that staff are aware of the importance of early planning and helped by cross service planning for cases likely to enter care proceedings.

**2) strong tracking and case planning to avoid drift and achieve permanence** the CLA 0-12 Service has consolidated and re-configured into smaller teams with Team Managers directly managing social work practice. This has reduced delay in the system and tightened up planning. The Permanence Tracking System was reviewed in October 2010 and a new strategy to track LAC through permanence has been established. This is more rigorous and uses the information in Care First more intelligently and the Quality Assurance IRO Manager attends the panel to take issues back to IROs and develop a broader view and understanding of permanence as well as a tighter system.

*Standards of practice by individuals and teams can and does have a crucial impact on placement stability but can be minimised through robust monitoring practices*<sup>2</sup>. Improved performance management and addressing of concerning social work practice has contributed to improvements in this area. Maximum Impact Management Training for all CLA Managers is not unrelated to a better focus on social work practice addressing the needs of children.

It is recognised that the proposed reconfiguration of CLA services proposes to place the Adoption and Permanence team within the overall management of the 0-12 Service.

### **3) increased placement choice**

Good placement choice has always been an important part of social work practice in Southwark for children who need to be placed long term in local authority care. The priority has been to utilise Southwark's own fostering service as much as possible importantly because this allows for close access to an excellent support service and co-location with Carelink. Where Southwark carers have been unable to meet the needs of a particular child then an appropriate placement has been sought in the private and voluntary sector.

Southwark's ability to recruit new carers has been limited, and anecdotally it is felt by some social workers and managers that some placements could benefit from less children to enable the foster carer to better focus on the needs of the children in placement. A more imaginative, creative and forward-looking recruitment strategy for Foster Carers is being proposed to refresh the current cohort of carers and enable greater placement choice, and better placement quality. A more rigorous commissioning strategy will also be in place from March 2011 for contracting with independent fostering agencies to enable better placement choice and standards of support and care.

### **4) increased multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support**

Key partnerships have been consolidated and continued to focus on working to enable the complex needs of this group of children to be met.

Carelink provides continued expert child mental health support to foster carers and social workers as well as undertaking direct therapeutic/clinical work on some cases. This is highly valued by foster carers and social workers who acknowledge its significant contribution to building resilience in placements with carers and promoting understanding of the complexities of caring for challenging children.

The LAC Education Team have continued to work alongside social workers to provide direct and responsive support to negotiate the plethora of problems and barriers that can get in the way of LAC accessing fully the benefits of the education system with the right support. Co-location with social workers and great knowledge and passion have meant that foster placements have been supported by children remaining within their school placements or accessing a new appropriate placement quickly with their needs considered. In some cases there have been considerable problems requiring direct intervention and support from the LAC Education Team. Such support to enable

---

<sup>2</sup> 'Patterns and Explanations of Placement stability and Change', published in 2004, carried out by the Social Work Research and Development Unit at the University of York, studied 13 participating councils. Although a very comprehensive study of practice this report concentrates on a number of key findings which should resonate with all those involved in prioritising good outcomes for looked after children;

placements to consolidate and stabilise is the essential platform upon which later achievement is built. It is notable that 80% of all children LAC over 2.5 years need a significant focus in their education of (*School Action, School Action Plus, Statement*) and that 100% of unstable children do.

From September 2010 the management of the CLA education service passed to the Virtual Head Teacher. The team is now subject to reconfiguration proposals as part of the 2011/12 children's services review.