

Item No. 6.	Classification: Open	Date: June 25 2009	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Long Term Stability of Placements	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Assistant Director of Children's Specialist Services & Safeguarding	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members to note the latest analysis of children and young people who have breached the indicator and the overall improvement in the stability of placements in Southwark.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Placement stability is crucial for children in care to help them achieve better outcomes and have a good experience of being in care. It is therefore important that authorities make achieving very high levels of placement stability a high priority. Placement stability is a critical quality indicator about standards of care in any children's residential service. In Southwark's Joint Area Review (JAR), it was noted that:

“unvalidated data show the long-term stability placements for children who are looked after has declined”

- 3 Performance in this area was subsequently noted as an important weakness in the final JAR report. While the inspector acknowledged that Southwark had many of the key elements in place to support the stability of placements, the success of these measures was not being evidenced by the performance data.
4. The definition of the indicator is: % CLA under 16 years old who have been looked after for 2-1/2+ years and living in the same placement for 2+ years or who have been placed for adoption. Following the JAR, validated returns showed that Southwark's performance was strong, and in line with statistical neighbours. However, as of February 2009, of the 179 under 16 CLA, only 119 were in stable placements (66.5%); less than its 07/08 Target & 07/08 SN of 70% and 68% respectively. However, this data must be treated with caution, because the cohort changes regularly as children become 16 and leave the cohort, while others enter the cohort as they become looked after for 2 and half years.
5. The latest validated data for Southwark shows that placement stability has risen to 71%, which is above our target and places us in the top quartile for performance nationally.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. As a result of the JAR recommendations, a working group was established to look in more detail at the factors causing placement instability, and measures that could be established to improve performance. A more detailed analysis of those children who had breached the indicator revealed that:

	Nov 2006	March 09
Total Children in Care	635	530
Over 2.5 years	220 (35%)	183 (35%)
Same place 2 years	135	130
Changed Placement	79	53
D78	61%	71%

7. The improvement in performance has been due to a number of factors including: rigorous data cleansing (every child who fails D78 currently is 0.6% of the PI); and children who have moved out of the cohort (age and stability) are proportionately more than those that have moved in. The improvement in performance is not related to the fact that there has been a steady reduction in the overall number of children in care, as the proportion of children in care who have remained in placement for 2.5 years or more remains the same (35%) despite a 17% reduction in overall numbers. Improved adoption and Special Guardianship Order performance will also have an impact on this indicator in the long-term.

	Male	Female
Overall %	74% (39)	26% (14)
Planned	56% (30)	44% (23)
Unplanned	82% (43)	18% (10)

8. 53 children in care were not able to remain in their placement for 2.5 years or more. Some of these changes are classed as unavoidable. 5 children changed placements due to reasons well outside anyone's control. Regrettably 2 foster carers died, and the children were no longer able to remain in the placement. 3 were moved following decisions of child protection strategy meetings, where it was not longer felt to be safe for the children to stay with the carers.
9. 19 children had planned placement moves which included the following: moves to kinship carers; moves from failed family placements; rehabilitation to families; moves from siblings where the placement had become untenable; move to an out of borough placement because of risk posed by parent. It is worth noting that 82% of the unplanned moves involved boys, and more analysis will be needed to understand whether there are particular factors which need to be addressed to improve performance in this area.
10. There were 29 unplanned placement changes. The main reason for unplanned changes was due to the disruptive behaviour of the child. Child behaviour issues may mask underlying issues relating to placement matching inadequate care; carer not equipped or supported to manage the changing needs of a child (for example, involvement in offending/gangs); inadequate provision of support services (CAMHS, social work, educational support). Further audits of cases are planned in order to better understand why placements have disruption. These cases are more likely to have had many placement moves (52% 5+) and more likely to be older. 82% were boys.
11. The case studies in Appendix 1 give examples of the different reasons for placement change. It should be noted that a good performance in adoption and permanence can have a negative impact on performance in long-term stability, as this would include children who were likely to be in more stable placements.

12. Previous studies have shown that no one action can have an impact on performance. However four key factors taken together can improve outcomes in this area. They are:
- Effective diversion from care and early intervention
 - Strong tracking and case planning to avoid drift and achieve permanence
 - Increased placement choice
 - Increased multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support to placements
13. Southwark has already put in place a range of services and interventions to address these key areas. The new strategy to reduce the need for children to enter care was endorsed by Members at the previous committee. Although this is a whole system approach, key services such as the development of Family Group Conferences, which draw on the support of the extended family, have enabled children to remain at home safely.
14. Southwark has strong and effective systems for care planning which are overseen by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Members are familiar with the work of the IROs through their annual report which was presented to an earlier committee. The IROs are independent of the line management of a child's social worker and are empowered to ensure that there are clear plans in place for each child. They monitor these plans to make sure and they are completed within timescales which meet the child's needs.
15. Southwark has good fostering and adoption services which provide a range of placement choices for children in care. For children with more complex needs, the service is able to commission more specialist placements from private and voluntary sector providers. Ironically, our success at adopting more children from care will have had an adverse impact on our performance, as a more stable cohort of children will have moved out of care. Our adoption performance remains stronger than ever, and is evidence of effective permanence planning.
16. The children looked after service provides multi-agency support to children in care, and has helped to maintain placement stability. Services include: Carelink, which provides a flexible mental health service for children, and advice for foster carers; and additional education support and advice.
17. Although a range of services have been put in place to improve the long-term stability of children in care, progress against the indicator will continue to be monitored by the long-term stability working group which is chaired by the Assistant Director, Specialist Children's Services. Work is already underway to identify children and young people who will fall within the cohort next year, and plans will be put in place to minimise placement change.

Policy implications

18. Work on this indicator is in line with the objectives for children looked after set out in the Children and Young People's Plan, and recommendations arising from Southwark's Joint Area Review.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

19. There are no additional resource implications arising from this report.

Finance Director

20. There are no financial implications.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services and Safeguarding	
Report Author	As above.	
Version	Final	
Dated	12.6.2009	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director for Communities, Law & Governance	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes	Yes
List other officers here		
Executive Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team		16 June 2009

APPENDIX A

Stability Examples for children who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years and NOT in the same placement for 2 years.

Every case is different. A lot of detail is not needed to understand particular reasons in some cases.

Unavoidable change

CB. 8 year old boy, foster carer died. Has been looked after for 3 years. Placement changed due to death of foster carer.

Planned change

EB. 12 year old white and black African boy. Became a looked after child in June 2005. Mental health issues of mother leading to hospitalisation and unpredictable behaviour. EB experienced neglect in his mother's care when she was unwell and her illness placed him at risk of physical harm. He was 8 years old when he became looked after. Care proceedings started July 2005 and concluded with a full care order in July 2006. He was placed with his maternal grandmother who was assessed as a Southwark carer. The care plan was to discharge the care order should mother show stability in her mental health over a continuing period. This was achieved and he was rehabilitated to his mother's care in April 2008. Court proceedings to discharge the care orders commence on 5th June 2009 (date for first hearing).

Unplanned change

CB a 15 year old Black Caribbean boy. Became a looked after child in July 2006 at the age of 12 years. Drug misusing parents. Experienced chronic neglect and emotional harm. He was left caring for his siblings and brought them into care himself. Subject to care proceedings from July 2007 until December 2007. This was relatively short as the issues were clear and harm severe.

His first placement lasted 5 months. He was placed in an emergency as he was subject to an emergency protection order. His behaviour was difficult and emotionally challenging for the foster carer but as an emergency placement it would not necessarily fit with his needs which social workers were only beginning to understand. The second placement lasted 18 months. The same difficulties emerged but the foster carer was well supported. The child's father was extremely undermining of the placement and his behaviour was exacerbated by this which led to the breakdown. The behaviour was rudeness and defiance to carer, difficulties with boundaries, minor offending and at rivalry with other children in placement presenting chronic behaviour management problems. He received therapeutic support from Carelink but carried a great emotional conflict between his birth family and foster family, compounded by guilt around his siblings' care. Carelink also supported his foster carer with specialist advice and support and advised the professional network. His next placement lasted 4 months. Similar emotional difficulties. CB complained about things he didn't like in the placement despite many positives, he made it very clear he wanted to live with his father. The carer felt unable to continue despite support. He has been in his current placement for 9 months since September 2009. Issues remain as child wishes to live with his father and given child's age and some change in circumstances of the father, this is being actively considered currently.