

<b>Item No.</b> 7.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 3 November 2014	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Placement Stability - Factors Affecting Long Term Stability	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director, Children's Social Care	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That Members consider the information presented in this report on placement stability and note the actions we are taking to ensure positive outcomes are achieved for looked after children in Southwark.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Achieving stable and permanent placements for children and young people who are not able to live at home is a priority and leads to better outcomes.
3. Permanence for looked after children implies that they do not move around the care system, achieve stability of placement, and have a family they can rely on and where they feel included. DfE guidance describes permanence as consisting of three aspects: emotional permanence (attachment); physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence (the carer has parental responsibility for the child) (Baker, 2011)<sup>1</sup>.
4. In their 2013 Data Pack<sup>2</sup> the DfE state that 'research shows that repeated placement breakdown or moving between home and care increases the likelihood of children developing multiple problems, becoming more challenging and needing intensive, high cost placements'. In 2005 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>3</sup> reported that young people who experience stable placements providing good quality care are more likely to succeed educationally, be in work, settle in and manage their accommodation after leaving care, feel better about themselves and achieve satisfactory social integration in adulthood than young people who have experienced further movement and disruption during their time in care.
5. In Southwark we aim to achieve stability by supporting children to stay with their families where this is appropriate and by ensuring that for those who do move into care there is a thorough assessment of their needs and a care plan is developed which outlines how these needs will be best met, including where children and young people will live.

<sup>1</sup> Baker (2011) Permanence and stability for disabled looked after, IRISS.  
children <http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/permanence-and-stability-disabled-looked-after-children>

<sup>2</sup> DfE (2013) Data Pack: Improving Permanence for looked after children.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-permanence-for-looked-after-children-data-pack>

<sup>3</sup> Morris (2005) Children on the edge of care, JRF

## Long-term stability

6. The DfE defines long-term stability as follows:
  - The long-term stability indicator is defined as the percentage of looked after children aged under 16 who have 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 lasted for at least 2 years.
7. The long term stability indicator takes time to affect. 100% performance is not expected as placement changes are inevitable and, as mentioned above, are sometimes desirable in order to better meet children and young people's needs.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

### 2013/2014 Long term placement stability

8. At the end of each financial year a detailed data return is submitted to the DfE this is then published which makes it possible to compare Southwark's performance with other local authorities. The latest comparative data available is for 2012/2013.
9. As at 31 March Southwark had 550 children looked after. Of those 169 (31%) have been looked after for over 2.5 years; 101 of which are considered stable (living in the same placement for at least 2 years) and 68 are considered 'unstable'; having at least one placement change in the last 2 years.
10. The indicator has decreased by 3 percentage points to 59.8% from 2013 to 2014 percentage of looked after children in Southwark aged under 16 recorded in the long-term stability. The mid year figure (September 2014) is currently 67%, which demonstrates a recent improvement.
11. In 2012/2013 the long term stability rate for our statistical neighbours was 69% and for England it was 68%.

## Age

12. Based on the age of the child at 31 March 2014, those aged 11-15 make up 63% of the unstable cohort (of those the highest proportion are aged 12 (16%)).

Age at 31 March 2014	Number of C&YP
4	1
5	3
6	4
7	3
8	6
9	4
10	4
11	7
12	11
13	9
14	7
15	9

Age at start of current placement	Number of C&YP
3	2
4	2
5	3
6	8
7	2
8	7
9	2
10	9
11	8
12	5
13	8
14	8
15	4

13. Most unstable children were aged between 10-14 when they started in their current placement.
14. Those aged of 4-9 when entering care make up 69% of the unstable cohort, the majority of those are aged 7.

Age at entry into care	Number of C&YP
0	3
1	4
2	2
3	5
4	9
5	5
6	9
7	10
8	5
9	9
10	2
11	4
13	1

15. In the current cohort, those who became looked after before the age of 5 are more likely to be stable.

### Gender

16. There are more males in the unstable cohort than females.

Male	Female
40	28

## Ethnicity

17. The majority of those in the unstable cohort are white British.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of C&amp;YP</b>
White British	16
Black African	13
Black Caribbean	10
White Other	8
Black Other	7
Mixed White Black Caribbean	6
Mixed Other	3
Asian Bangladeshi	3
Mixed White Black African	2

## Legal status

18. 88% of the unstable cohort are on a full care orders.

<b>Legal status</b>	<b>Number of C&amp;YP</b>
Full Care Orders	60
Placement Order	6
S20	2

## Types of placement

19. 49 (72%) children and young people in the unstable cohort are in placements provided by voluntary or private sector providers. 46 of those are placed out of borough either in children's homes or with independent fostering agencies (IFAs).

	<b>Children's Homes</b>	<b>Whereabouts known</b>	<b>FC-Relative or Friend</b>	<b>FC-other</b>	<b>Care Home</b>	<b>Grand total</b>
<b>Own provision (LA)</b>			1	17		18
<b>Private Provision</b>	15			33	1	49
<b>N/A</b>		1				1
<b>Grand total</b>	15	1	1	50	1	68

## Distance placement

20. 60 of the 68 (88%) unstable placements are in out of borough placements. 32 (47%) of these were placed 20 miles or over from Southwark. In the stable cohort, 76% were placed out of borough and 23% were placed 20 miles+.

	In	Out	N/A	Grand total
<b>Own provision (LA)</b>	4	14		18
<b>Private provision</b>	3	46		49
<b>N/A</b>			1	1
<b>Grand total</b>	7	60	1	68

## Missing

21. Analysis of this group shows that only the unstable group of children aged 13 or over have missing from care episodes (17 children).

## Unstable cohort - categorisation of changes of placement

22. **Planned changes** - 34 children (51%) had planned placement moves. The vast majority of these were to planned long term foster carers. For some this had been when the previous long term placement had ceased to be able to meet the child's needs and although this was a move for the child it was felt best for them that this move went ahead. For a small number of these the issues related to the quality of care that was provided by the carer.
23. **Unplanned changes** 26 children (39%). The main reasons for moves were the behavior of the child, a significant minority of these involving offending. A significant number (9) had previous long term placements that ended in an unplanned way. This group has the children with the most needs and they show very challenging behaviour including violent, sexualised and/or offending behaviour. Child behaviour issues *sometimes* masks underlying issues relating to: inadequate matching (may or may not have been predictable); quality of 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. This proportion is broadly the same as previous analysis of this group.
24. **Unavoidable changes** - 7 (10%) children changed placements due to reasons beyond control. 1 of the children had a foster carer who ceased fostering (retirement) but the child is placed very well with another carer and sees her former carer as a grand parent figure. 6 out of 7 moved due to allegations against the foster carer. This included a sibling group of 3, the oldest of whom was physically assaulted by the male foster carer who was convicted of assault. This proportion is broadly the same as previous analysis of this group

## Policy implications

25. Ofsted's recent thematic review; From a Distance<sup>4</sup>, which examined looked after children living away from their home area in 9 local authorities across the country noted that too often, the quality of the care and support that was provided to children was assessed and monitored by social workers without the appropriate level of expert advice from health or education specialists.

<sup>4</sup> Ofsted (April, 2014) From a Distance; Looked after children living away from their home area.

26. The same report noted that Independent Reviewing Officers rarely contacted children living out of area between reviews and did not provide enough challenge and that careful matching was much more likely to occur when agreeing for children to live in foster families than it was when the decision was for them to live in a children's home.
27. Research<sup>5</sup> conducted by Boddy (2013) found that older children entering the care system have distinct and often more challenging needs, which has implications for their experiences of permanence. They have particular needs for stability and support as they move towards adulthood, but do not necessarily need or want a permanent alternative family.
28. The Joint All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) enquiry heard evidence that children living away from family and friends were more likely to go missing and, therefore, were at higher risk of physical and sexual abuse, criminality and homelessness. The report detailed local authority difficulties in monitoring the progress of children placed away from their home area and the considerable problems in accessing the necessary support services for this vulnerable group of children.<sup>6</sup>

### **Causes of placement instability – learning from research and feedback from children and young people**

29. In addition local research and feedback from children and young people indicates that the following issues impact on placement stability:
  - Lack of availability of placements to meet specific needs
  - Lack of additional support – for both foster carers and children
  - Poor quality provision
  - Unsuccessful attempts at family reunification.
  - Inability of placement providers to address behavioural issues.

### **Actions being taken**

30. As noted above achieving permanence and stability for looked after children is complex and involves a number of different professionals. For example: social workers, brokers who buy independent sector places, the in-house foster care service and the virtual school.
31. A LAC Strategic Group has been established which will improve co-ordination between the different parts of the looked after system. This group will co-ordinate the development and delivery of a LAC Strategy which will incorporate the work already undertaken on ensuring Southwark complies with the statutory Sufficiency Duty on ensuring an appropriate supply of good quality placements.
32. A recent placement stability audit has taken place and a number of actions are being taken to address the issues raised including:

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<sup>5</sup> Boddy (April, 2013) The Care Inquiry: Understanding permanence of Looked After Children [http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Care\\_Inquiry\\_files/Understanding\\_Permanence\\_-\\_review\\_of\\_evidence.pdf](http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Care_Inquiry_files/Understanding_Permanence_-_review_of_evidence.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care, The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care leavers, 2012, p 9; [www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away-c](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away-c).

- Further work on hearing and acting on the voice of children and young people who are looked after by increasing young people's involvement in the development and on-going monitoring of care plans and pathways plans and providing an independent service for young people who go missing to be interviewed on their return
- Developing a better understanding of the current and future needs of children and young people, through more use of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires for example.
- Improving contract management
- Providing additional training for staff and foster carers on recognising and supporting mental health/therapeutic support needs of children and young people.
- Strengthen the role of the IRO in reporting issues with all relevant staff.

33. In addition the LAC Strategic Group is prioritising work on initiatives which will increase services and support to enable more children and young people to remain at home. This includes developing more "edge of care" services with a particular focus on work with adolescents.

### **Community impact statement**

34. Southwark Looked After Children services works to promote the best possible outcomes for children in care. The care population is diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity and we closely monitor these protectiveness characteristics to ensure we understand specific needs and are able to deliver services that address these needs. It is recognised that placement stability, engagement in education, access to leisure and healthy lifestyles all help to build resilience for young people to successfully achieve economical wellbeing and make a positive contribution. Effective performance monitoring supports these objectives and enables us to identify areas where improvements may need to be made.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
None		

### **APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Rory Patterson, Director Children’s Social Care		
<b>Report Author</b>	Alasdair Smith, Head of Service, Permanence		
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<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>	
Director of Legal Services	N/a	N/a	
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