
PLACEMENT STABILITY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Children and Young People Panel with a report on the stability of placements for children and young people in relation to Performance Indicator CSC015 that measures the number of Looked After children who have experienced three placement moves or more during a rolling twelve-month period.

Summary

2. The report provides details on the current performance in relation to the stability of placements for looked after children and discusses future target setting in relation to Performance Indicator CSC015.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Members note the contents of the report.

Suzanne Joyner
Director of Children and Adult Services

Background Papers

Fostering Statement of Purpose: August 2015
The Care Standards Act 2000
Working Together to Safeguard Children: March 2013
Fostering Service Regulations 2011
The National Minimum Standards 2011
Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (Amendments July 2013)
Regionalising Adoption (August 2015)

Hilary Tillotson : Extension 6598

S17 Crime and Disorder	Low level risk due to placements for young people with complex needs
Health and Well Being	This meets the Health and Wellbeing requirements of LAC
Carbon Impact	This has no carbon impact
Diversity	This meets the needs of LAC
Wards Affected	All wards could be affected
Groups Affected	LAC children
Budget and Policy Framework	There will be budgetary impacts in relation to this service to the Council's MTFP
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Placements across the Borough
Efficiency	Links to DBC provision

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis Range of Provision in Darlington

4. The Family Placement Service is based in the Annex, Central House, Gladstone Street, Darlington. The service is responsible for the recruitment, training, assessment and support of internal foster carers, adopters, supported lodgings providers and the completion of assessments for those making application for Special Guardianship Orders.
5. Internal Children's Homes provision in Darlington consists of three Children's Homes able to care for three looked after young people in each.
6. Darlington is part of the Tees Valley Framework together with Middlesbrough, Stockton, Redcar/Cleveland and Hartlepool local authorities. Jointly we commission fostering placements from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). All of the IFAs used have been rigorously evaluated and ranked based on an outcomes framework. The use of the outcomes framework ensured that all agencies had the appropriate safeguarding procedures in place and offer placements with well trained and supported foster carers and where outcomes for children and young people have been good. The Tees Valley framework also gives DBC access to a number of remand beds should these be required.
7. On 1 April 2016 a new Tees Valley Residential Framework became available to enable all five Tees Valley Local Authorities to have access to over 130 individual Children's Homes. All of the providers have been through a rigorous evaluation process to ensure that they were able to provide appropriate placements within an agreed cost framework.
8. DBC commission three beds in Auton House Children's Home that is owned and managed by St Cuthbert's Care. At the time of writing three children are in this provision. The agreement is currently due for review.
9. Supported Lodgings placements for looked after young people are available via internal provision.
10. An increasing number of looked after young people when they reach the age of 18 years are remaining in Staying Put Arrangements with their previous DBC or Independent Fostering Agency foster carers.
11. Where the needs of children and young people are unable to be met from the provision detailed above the Placements Officer will search care provision on the Tees Valley Frameworks and throughout the country for appropriate and safe foster placements and residential settings which meet the specific needs of our children and young people. The Placement Officer ensures that referral requests and risk assessments are complete prior to sending out to the 18 independent fostering agencies and residential children's homes. Where the needs of the young person means that they are not able to be placed within an internal

placement or locally known and tried and tested residential children's home then the North East Portal is used to reach more providers. Throughout the placement search the placements officer ensures that the child's social worker is supported in liaison with the provider and ensures that the charges for placements are accurate together with ensuring any travel costs are appropriate and all discounts are taken. The placement officer also ensures appropriate notice periods are given on the placements to make sure that additional costs are not incurred.

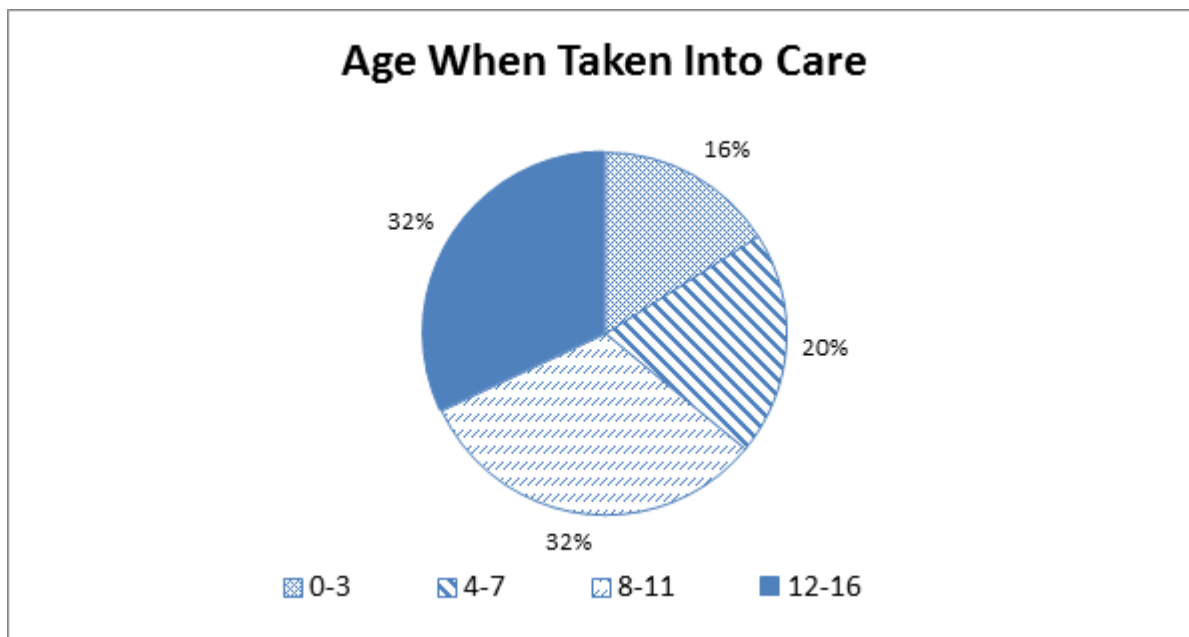
12. Some looked after children require permanent alternative care outside of their families and have a plan for adoption. Adoptive placements are identified from our internal provision, via the North East Consortium and via the Adoption Register and Adoption Link. Work on the feasibility of developing a Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is currently being undertaken with the use of funding from DfE. The formation of the Tees Valley RAA should give access to a wider range of available adoptive placements and support the process of children moving to adoption families for effectively.

Performance

13. DBC target against Performance Indicator CSC015 target for year ending 31 March 2016 is 12%.
14. Performance Indicator CSC015 looks at the number of Looked After children who have experienced three placement moves or more during a rolling twelve-month period. At the 31 March 2015 the figure was 13% and at 31 March 2016 the figures 11.39% showing 1.61% improvement on the previous 12 month figures.

Exploring some of the Issues behind the Figures: CSC015

15. The percentage figure should be low in this Performance Indicator. Although it is hoped that children and young people do not experience placement moves sometimes it is necessary to ensure that children continue to be safeguarded. Children and young people need to be in placements that ensure their safety and future development and at times a move of placement is needed to achieve this. It is also essential that we listen to the wishes and feelings of children and young people and offer them choice in where they live; this can mean that children and young people request changes of placement to give them access to social activities and to live nearer to their family.



(Based on cohort from 1 February – 30 January 2016 who had experienced placement move or more)

16. Exploring the age at which the children and young people who experienced a significant number of moves provides useful information in order to ensure that age appropriate placements are available. 64% of children who experience over three moves came into care aged eight years and over.
17. Themes from a focus piece of work completed in relation to this cohort of children and young people highlighted some lack of placement choice with carers and in residential settings that would best meet their needs. This was particularly evident in relation to older young people and their late entry into care.
18. The process of matching children and carers was also highlighted as needing to be improved alongside the need for more placement choice of internal and external provision.
19. Changes in social worker and the availability of clear assessments of the needs of children and young can impact upon the identification of appropriate placements.

Future Performance

20. There has been an improvement in this performance indicator at the 31 March 2016 and the target set of 12% exceeded by 0.61%. This is a small improvement and one we plan to improve upon.
21. Statistical Neighbour performance is 9.1%. To set this as a target currently without the proposed changes having been implemented and given some time to embed would stretch this target too far. However, a 1% reduction could be aimed for across then next 12 months and once achieved the target reduced

to 11% for year 2017/2018. Feedback from our improvement partner Red Quadrant during a recent session on stability of placement suggested that this stepped approach to improving performance in this area and setting realistic targets would be sensible.

Current Monitoring Placements

22. Disruptions of placements are carefully monitored and disruption meetings are held to explore the reasons why a particular placement hasn't worked for a child or young person.
23. Monthly exception reports are provided to all managers in order for them to be aware of placement moves and to support them in identifying where specific support maybe required help a child or young person to settle in their new placement.
24. Where a child or young person is in a foster placement the foster carers have regular and focused supervision with their social worker and access to training and support. Foster carer annual reviews take place which look at the skill level and developmental needs of the carers and take into account views of the child or young person in placement. Regular unannounced visits to foster carers homes place to monitoring carefully the care provided.
25. The care plans for individual children are reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer in conjunction with the case holding social worker and all those involved in the care and support of the child and young person.
26. Monthly External Placement Meetings ensure that all managers have oversight of the use of those placements commissioned from external providers for fostering, residential and staying put provision.
27. Where additional supports and resources are required to maintain appropriate placements these are identified and agreed by Darlington Access to Resource Panel (DARP) if specific funding is required.

Areas for further Development 2017/2018

Management Oversight of Placement Stability

28. DARP is the first point at which placement stability is monitored. Where a placement is agreed at the panel there are timescales set for the period the placement is agreed and requests for continuing placements return to DARP for future agreement and support packages if required.
29. External Placement monitoring takes place monthly the meeting chaired by a Head of Service gives scrutiny to the use of commissioned placements and provides a forum for agreement for long term matching and support packages where required.

On-going Recruitment of Internal Foster Carers

30. The need for placement choice is vital when trying to identify appropriate and safe placements for children and young people. Particularly important is the need to keep children together with their siblings where this is desirable. In order to ensure that we have access to a range of foster placements with foster carers who are able to meet the sometimes complex and immediate needs of individual children and siblings groups we need to continually recruit and train foster carers. The DBC foster care recruitment strategy for the next two years focuses upon the recruitment of foster carers for sibling groups and individual children between 5 – 17 years old. This focus upon the recruitment of carers for older children and young people will enable the use of internal provision opposed to the more costly IFA placements currently needing to be accessed.
31. The recruitment of internal foster carers able to managing challenging behaviour and emotional distress has been highlighted as a specific need. The Family Intervention Team's therapeutic services is available to enable these foster carers to be trained and supported in providing placements for more challenging young people. In addition training provided by the Educational Psychologist's Department has been designed to better meet the needs of foster carers managing children with a range of more challenging behaviours and emotional difficulties.

Tees Valley Independent Fostering Agency Framework (IFA)

32. All placements commissioned from the framework are monitored carefully via the child's looked after review; foster carers are reviewed annually and via the quarterly IFA evaluation meetings. Detailed placement evaluation forms are completed by the child's social worker and form part of the overall evaluation of placements provided by the Tees Valley Framework. This information also informs the types of placements needed in order to enable the Independent Fostering Agencies to recruit to meet need.

Conclusion and Planned Actions for the coming 6 months

33. The on-going monitoring of placement stability is essential to ensure the safe care of children and young people in whichever kind of provision they are living in. The appropriateness of each placement is vital in ensuring the best possible opportunity for the child or young person to achieve their individual potential. This will continue to be the focus of DARP reviews and External Placement Monitoring meetings. Over the coming months there will be consideration given to the merging of these two meetings and the remit widened in order to give a clearer management overview of performance.
34. There have been improvements over the past months in the availability of more accurate and timely performance data ensuring that managers are able to more closely monitor performance. Monthly performance monitoring meetings with all managers includes all performance indicators relating to stability of placement.

35. Review of provision for 16 and 17 year olds is to be completed with commissioner and supporting people.
36. During June 2016 a themed audit of cases where there have been three placement moves within a 12-month period will be carried out. Learning from these audits will further inform areas for practice improvement and provide information that will link to the updating of the Darlington Borough Council Sufficiency Plan for 2017-2018.
37. The Tees Valley Residential Children's Home Framework that started on 1 April 2016 will be subject to evaluation by both individual local authorities and within the Tees Valley group to ensure that outcomes are being achieved and sufficiency of placements is meeting local need.

Update of the Darlington Borough Council Sufficiency Plan for 2017-2018

38. Monthly monitoring of the Fostering Recruitment Strategy together with targeted recruitment activity supported by a marketing graduate intern will ensure that the planned additional numbers of foster carers are assessed and approved.
39. Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been implemented and currently recruitment of social workers is progressing. Increased social worker capacity and stability within teams will ensure that children and young people do not experience numerous changes of social worker. Continuity of social worker will enable the completion of assessments can be completed more timely and identify needs earlier, this will enable more robust matching.
40. Planning for the development of an Edge of Care Service is currently underway. It is hoped that our skilled Children's Homes staff group and foster carers will be involved in providing support to young people and their families to avoid them needing to be looked after. When there is a plan for a child or young person to return home this service will provide short breaks and support the rehabilitation plans to help young people return to the care of their families safely.