
PLACEMENT STABILITY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC)

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides a position statement of the stability and duration of placements of children who are Looked After.

Summary

2. There are two performance indicators that are relevant to placement stability:
 - The percentage of LAC at the reporting date with 3 or more placement moves during the last 12 months
 - The percentage of LAC aged under 16 at 31 March who had been Looked After continuously for at least 2.5 years and 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
3. A report regarding performance against the first indicator is attached at **Appendix 1** for information.
4. A report regarding performance against the second indicator is attached at **Appendix 2** for information.
5. The current performance for the indicator referring to 3 or more placement moves continues to improve and has seen a reduction to 12% in September 2017 from 16.1% in May 2017. Darlington's target for this indicator is 10%.
6. The current performance for the indicator referring to placement duration also continues to improve and has seen an increase from 51.6% in April 2017 to 57.1% in September 2017. Darlington's target for this indicator is 65%.

Recommendation

7. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Members note for information the current performance regarding placement stability for children in care.
 - (b) Members note for information the analysis reports provided at Appendix 1 and 2.

Suzanne Joyner
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN & ADULT SERVICES

Background Papers

There were no background papers used in this report.

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The report is about placement stability for children in care and will not impinge on the duty on the authority to prevent crime and disorder in the Borough.
Health and Well Being	Placement stability for children in care will assist in improving the health and well-being of Darlington's 0 to 18 population.
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report.
Diversity	There are no specific proposals within this report that impact on diversity issues.
Wards Affected	There are no specific proposals within this report that will impact on Wards.
Groups Affected	Children who are in the care of Darlington Borough Council are affected by placement stability performance, including those Care Leavers who have been looked after.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report is for information only and does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This report is for information only.
Urgent Decision	This report is for information only.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Access to high quality, stable and resilient placements for children in care will improve both the quality of life and health and well-being of children and young people in the Borough.
Efficiency	This report is for information only.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Placement stability directly impacts on the quality of life and health and well-being of children in care and Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. Darlington's performance for both placement stability indicators for children who are Looked After remain outliers when compared with the statistical neighbour benchmark, the North East average and the England average. Therefore, analyses have been undertaken of both performance indicators to enable an understanding of why this is so and to establish measures to address this.

The percentage of LAC at the reporting date with 3 or more placement moves during the last 12 months

9. In 2016, the Statistical Neighbour average for this indicator was 9.5%, the North East average was 9% and the England average was 10% (source: Local Authority Interactive Tool). Darlington's target for this indicator is 10%.
10. An analysis of this performance is attached at appendix 1 for information.
11. This performance indicator is calculated by using the number of children who have had 3 or more placement moves in the past 12 months (numerator) which is then divided by the total number of children who are looked after (denominator). As can be seen in the figures below, although the percentage is affected by a changing denominator, the numerator which is the actual number of children who are in this cohort has reduced over the past 4 months:

- April 2017 – 14.4% (31 children out of 216 children)
- May 2017 – 16.1% (34 children out of 211 children)
- June 2017 – 15.5 % (33 children out of 213 children)
- July 2017 – 13.6% (29 children out of 213 children)
- August 2017 – 13.2% (29 children out of 219 children)
- September 2017 – 12% (26 children out of 216 children)

The percentage of LAC aged under 16 at 31 March who had been Looked After continuously for at least 2.5 years and 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

12. In 2016, the Statistical Neighbour average for this indicator was 72.3%, the North East average was 72% and the England average was 68% (source: Local Authority Interactive Tool). Darlington's target for this indicator is 65%.
13. An analysis of this performance has been undertaken and is attached at appendix 2 for information.
14. This performance indicator is calculated by using the number of children who meet the criteria for duration of placement as described above (numerator) which is then divided by the total number of children who are in the overall cohort for this particular indicator (denominator). As can be seen in the figures below, although the percentage is affected by a changing denominator, the numerator which is the actual number of children who are in this cohort has increased over the past 3 months:

- April 2017 – 51.6% (33 children out of 64 children)
- May 2017 – 52.5% (32 children out of 61 children)
- June 2017 – 52.3% (34 children out of 65 children)
- July 2017 – 51.6% (33 children out of 64 children)
- August 2017 – 57.1% (36 children out of 63 children)
- September 2017 – 57.1% (36 children out of 63 children)

15. The improved trend in Darlington's performance is demonstrating strengthened management oversight and grip, and should provide Senior Managers and Members with a level of assurance regarding steady progress being made.

Effectiveness of the Placement Stability Strategy

16. A new Placement Stability Strategy was implemented in June 2017 and continues to be embedded into daily practice. Given the positive improvements that have been highlighted above in both of the placement stability indicators, the effectiveness of the strategy is beginning to provide a level of assurance given the positive direction of travel.

17. As can be seen with the data provided, the actual number of children included in both numerators for each indicator has reduced in the case of the 3 or more placement moves indicator, and increased in the case of the duration of placement indicator. This should provide assurance that the improved percentages in both indicators reflect actual improvements in placement stability.

18. Examples are also provided to evidence how the embedding of the Placement Stability Strategy is resulting in improved performance:

- An external residential provider recently submitted their notice to end a young person's placement due to his presenting behaviours. The Team Manager and the Children's Commissioning Manager facilitated a planning meeting to discuss the issues to determine what could be put in place to prevent the placement breakdown. As a direct result of this meeting the provider rescinded their notice. Planning meetings including Commissioners have not routinely been taking place in situations such as this, but it was the result of this joint representation at the meeting that the provider was supported to maintain the placement. Without this meeting, this young person would have needed to have moved placement.
- A Social Worker presented a case to the Resource Panel recently to request a placement for 2 siblings to be placed together. The siblings were already in foster-placements and had been placed separately following a disruption due to one sibling's aggressive behaviour towards the other. The discussion that was held was very reflective and resulted in a decision not to move 2 children from their stable placements because they:
 - had attached to their respective carers
 - they had already experienced a number of placement moves in quick succession
 - the siblings were not voicing a strong view that they wanted to be moved from their current placements into another placement just to be together

- the siblings were having a high level of contact with each other as their carers lived in close proximity
- there was no guarantee that another joint placement would be successful given their previous experience

If the Placement Stability Strategy had not been in place, it is highly likely that the children would have been moved again. On reflection, the Social Worker presenting the case agreed that on balance it was in the children's best interest to remain in their respective placements but to continue to support a high level of contact with them including overnight stays.

Conclusion and Summary of Next Steps

19. It is evident the embedding of the Placement Stability Strategy is having a direct impact on improving both performance indicators. Actions have already been identified within both reports attached at appendices 1 and 2 and work continues to ensure these are progressed at pace.

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) PLACEMENT STABILITY

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides a position statement of Darlington Borough Council's Looked After Children (LAC) placement stability performance given it is an outlier in comparison to the statistical neighbour benchmark, the regional average and the England average.

Summary

2. As an indicator, placement stability is defined as "the percentage of LAC at the reporting date with 3 or more placement moves during the last 12 months."
3. Over the course of 2016/17, 26 LAC experienced 3 or more placement moves. This figure equated to 12% of the LAC cohort (219) at the year end. This matched Darlington's performance in the previous year, as the year end figure for 2015/16 was also 12%. Darlington Borough Council has set its performance target at 10%.
4. Darlington's current performance exceeds the 2015/16 statistical neighbour benchmark of 8%, the North East average of 9% and the England average of 10%. Darlington's performance in April was 14%, 16% in May, 15% in June, then reducing back to 13% in July.
5. A Placement Stability Strategy was developed in January 2017 and is now being implemented. This strategy is to ensure that LAC remain in their placements for as long as they need to, and do not experience unnecessary moves. Increased performance in this area will also ensure improvements in relation to the children remaining in their placement for 2 years or more.

MAIN REPORT

Introduction

6. Darlington's performance in placement stability for LAC remains an outlier when compared with the statistical neighbour benchmark, the North East average and the England average. Therefore an analysis has been undertaken using the affected cohort, to enable understanding of why performance remains higher than comparators and how this can be addressed.

Analysis of LAC cohort

7. An audit of the 2016/17 year end LAC cohort was undertaken to ensure understanding of the issues encountered and to inform future actions.
8. An analysis of this cohort showed that:
 - 46% were aged between 15 and 17
 - 62% were male
 - 62% experienced 3 placement moves with the remaining experiencing more than 3 placement moves
 - 58% were subject to a full Care Order
9. A number of themes became apparent as a result of this analysis. It was evident that a percentage of this cohort had experienced a number of placement moves due to their presenting complex behaviours. For example, one LAC was subject to a Secure Order and a second had been detained under the Mental Health Act. A number of children had been moved to alternative foster-care placements as a result of allegations having been made against foster carers. All moves were deemed temporary until the outcome of the investigation was determined. However, it became apparent following the outcome of the investigations, that none of this affected cohort were subsequently returned to their previous foster-carer as it was not appropriate. As their temporary foster-carers could not maintain the child or young person in the placement, another placement needed to be identified causing a third placement move. It was also evident that Social Workers needed to understand how to correctly code placements when inputting into Liquidlogic as this had the potential to affect the data. Finally, it was positively noted that despite appearing in this cohort, a number of the children appear to be very settled in their current placement.

Outcome of analysis of LAC cohort

10. The findings from this analysis showed that whether it was foster care or residential care, provision needed to be resilient and able to effectively manage very challenging and often older young people who were predominantly male, to avoid placement breakdown. Therefore, the right placement must be sourced at the point of accommodation in order to prevent unnecessary placement moves. In addition, the looked after child must have a wrap-around package of care including education provision, therapeutic support and a consistent Social Worker in order to minimise the risk of placement breakdown.

11. It was evident the identification of emergency foster placements for LAC where an allegation against their foster-carer had been made, needed to end. While it is accepted that outcomes of investigations cannot be pre-empted, evidence from this cohort showed that children were not returning to their previous foster-carers. Therefore, placements needed to be identified whereby children would not need to be moved again, if the outcome of an investigation determined they could not return. It is acknowledged the current availability of foster-care placements is limited and work on a marketing strategy is underway to ensure there are sufficient to meet demand.
12. This analysis has enabled discussions to take place with the Family Placement Team and the Commissioning Service. It is evident there are currently issues regarding in-house placement sufficiency with both foster-carers and residential provision. This is compounded by the high level of competition experienced when needing to identify suitable external provision, when in-house provision is exhausted.

Summary of Next Steps

13. The findings from the analysis of the cohort mirrors those findings identified within Darlington's recently revised LAC Sufficiency Strategy and Placement Stability Strategy.
14. The following are the actions and progress made to date to address and improve placement stability:

a) Strong leadership and vision in respect of this performance

- This can be evidenced by the continued analysis of the affected LAC cohort each month since April 2017, which ensures there is an on-going focus on improving placement stability.
- A placement move tracker has been introduced to enable management oversight of performance.
- Instruction has been issued to all workers, that all proposed placement moves must be discussed and agreed with a Head of Service.
- Instruction and guidance has been issued to all workers, to ensure placement codes are correctly inputted onto Liquidlogic.
- Instruction and guidance has been issued to all workers and IROs, to highlight the need for placement planning meetings to be held where placements are deemed to be fragile and at risk of disruption.
- Instruction and guidance has been issued to all workers and IROs, to highlight the need for disruption meetings to be held in a timely fashion for those LAC who have experienced a disrupted placement to ensure learning is taken forward.
- There will be an analysis of foster-care allegations that have been made, to determine if there are any lessons to be learnt in their management, to ensure least disruption to the LAC.

b) Whole system approach to supporting LAC

- This can be evidenced by the transformation work-streams for the Edge of Care, Education, Foster-Care Marketing and In-House Residential Provision.

- c) Effective diversion from care and early intervention. Investing in early intervention to prevent breakdown in the family, robust gate-keeping processes and effective rehabilitation processes to return children home when safe to do so**
- This can be evidenced by the transformation work-stream for the Edge of Care.
- d) Strong tracking and case planning to avoid drift and achieve permanence**
- A permanence tracker has been introduced, to enable management oversight of performance.
- e) Increased placement choice to ensure there is a sufficient range of high quality accommodation for LAC within the area**
- This can be evidenced by the LAC Sufficiency Strategy action plan that is in place and being progressed.
 - This can be evidenced by the transformation work-streams for Foster-Care Marketing and In-House Residential Provision.
- f) Increased multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support to placements and increased partnership with foster-carers**
- This can be evidenced by the LAC Sufficiency Strategy action plan that is in place and being progressed.
 - Schools have been requested to highlight the children looked after who appear to be in fragile placements to Children's Social Care. This will ensure that a wrap-around package of support can be put in place in a timely manner.
- g) Children and young people to fully participate in decision-making**
- Work needs to be undertaken on building the Children in Care Council to ensure a wider cohort of views from LAC and Care Leavers can be routinely gathered, to aid in decision-making and service development.
 - Complaints made by LAC and their feedback to be routinely analysed, to inform both practice and service development.

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LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) WHO HAVE BEEN IN THE SAME PLACEMENT FOR THE PREVIOUS 2 YEARS OR MORE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides a position statement of the stability and duration of placements of LAC. As an indicator, this is defined as the percentage of LAC aged under 16 at 31 March who had been Looked After continuously for at least 2.5 years and 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.

Summary

2. The latest Department for Education figures for all Local Authorities on this indicator is for 2015/16. Darlington's percentage was 66% and equated to 70 children, the England average was 68% and statistical neighbours was 72%.
3. Darlington's performance in August 2017 is currently 57%. There are 63 children in this group of which 36 have been looked after for more than 2.5 years and have also been in their current placement for more than 2 years. This shows a decline in performance of 9% from the previous year.
4. Data has not yet been published regarding this indicator for 2016 /17 however, based on Darlington's current figures performance will be an outlier in comparison to the statistical neighbour benchmark, the regional average and the England average.
5. There are 2 main reasons why a reduction may be shown for this indicator:
 - Children have moved placement after a consistent placement of 2 years or more
 - Children have ceased to be Looked After
6. Analysis has been taken in order to have an understanding why performance is lower than comparators for this indicator and to put measures in place to address this.

MAIN REPORT

Introduction

7. Darlington's performance in placement stability (length of placement) remains an outlier when compared with the statistical neighbour benchmark, the North East average and the England average. Therefore, it has been necessary to undertake an analysis of the affected cohort to enable an understanding of why performance remains higher than comparators and put measures in place to address this.

Analysis of LAC cohort

8. An analysis of the demographics of this LAC cohort showed that:
 - 36 of the 63 LAC (57%) in this cohort had been Looked After for more than 2 years and had been accommodated in the same placement for more than 2.5 years.
 - 27 of the 63 LAC (43%) in this cohort had been Looked After for more than 2 years but had not been accommodated in the same placement for more than 2.5 years.
 - Of the cohort of 27, 15 were male and 12 female.
 - Of the cohort of 27, 1 was aged 0 – 4, 8 were aged 5 – 9, and 18 were aged 10 – 15.
9. Of the cohort of 27 LAC:
 - 1 child experienced an adoption disruption
 - 1 child was removed from their Connected Carer during an allegation but was subsequently returned following the conclusion of the investigation
 - 1 child moved placement in a planned way to be with his siblings
 - 3 children experienced a placement breakdown as their Connected Carer could no longer manage their behaviour. Support was offered to the Connected Carer however, this did not prevent the placement disrupting. The 3 children were able to return to their previous foster carer
 - 7 children had to move placement due to their foster-carers giving notice to end the placement. For example one young person experienced issues with anger and aggression, and whilst offered additional therapeutic support were unable to continue with his placement. Another young person was directly physically aggressive to their foster carer who felt unsafe. In all cases extra support was offered but despite this the placements were not maintained
 - 1 residential unit ended a placement meaning the young person had to move to an alternative one. This was due to aggressive behaviour from the young person towards both staff and another young person placed within the setting
 - 3 children had planned moves to an alternative placement
 - 6 children needed to move placement due to an allegation against their foster-carer
 - 4 children were removed from foster-carers due to concerns over standards of care.

10. The 10 children highlighted in the latter two bullet points above have experienced placement moves between 01/09/16 and 31/08/17. 5 due to allegations made against their foster carers, 2 due to standards of care, 2 due to the foster carer retiring and 1 young person moved on account of their foster carer not coping with the young person's increasingly challenging behaviour.

11. An analysis of these 10 children showed that:

- The children were placed as 3 groups of 2 siblings, 1 of 3 siblings and 1 single placement
- All were subject to full Care Orders
- 2 changed placement in September 2016, 3 in October 2016, 3 in November 2016 and 2 in February 2017
- Of the 5 foster placements the 10 children were placed in, 1 was an external foster-care provider, and 4 were Darlington's in-house foster carers
- The external foster-carer subsequently retired and there was a planned move to other foster-carers where the children have remained
- 2 of the Darlington in-house foster carer households were de-registered
- 1 of the Darlington in-house foster carer households were investigated for standards of care concerns
- 1 of the Darlington in-house foster carer households had given notice on account of concerns with the young person's behaviour. These foster carers were offered further support for this young person but they felt unable to continue with the placement and the young person moved in a planned way. Following training and enhanced support these foster carers are continuing to foster and provide one placement to an older male which is very stable.

Outcome of analysis of LAC cohort

12. Linking to the Placement Stability Report the right placement needs to be sourced at the point of accommodation in order to prevent unnecessary placement moves. In addition, the looked after child must have a wrap-around package of care including education provision, therapeutic support and a consistent Social Worker in order to minimise the risk of placement breakdown.

13. Analysis highlighted that emergency foster placements for LAC where an allegation against their foster-carer had been made ceased. While it is accepted that outcomes of investigations cannot be pre-empted, evidence from this cohort showed that LAC were not returning to their previous foster-carers. However, in the cohort of 10 children analysed as part of this work, 9 have remained in the placement they were subsequently moved to. Therefore, placements needed to be identified whereby LAC would not need to be moved again if the outcome of an investigation determined they could not return. However, it is acknowledged the current availability of foster-care placements is limited. This is resulting in LAC being placed in emergency placements that cannot meet their needs in the short-term let alone in the longer-term.

14. This analysis has enabled discussions to take place with the Family Placement Team and the Commissioning Service. It is evident there are currently issues regarding in-house placement sufficiency with both foster-carers and residential

provision. This is compounded by the high level of competition experienced when needing to identify suitable external provision when in-house provision is exhausted.

Summary of Next Steps

15. The findings from the analysis of the cohort mirrors those findings identified within Darlington's recently revised LAC Sufficiency Strategy and Placement Stability Strategy. The following are the actions and progress made to date to address and improve placement stability.

1. Ensure there will be strong leadership and vision in respect of this performance

- This can be evidenced by the continued analysis of the affected LAC cohort each month which ensures there is an on-going focus on improving placement stability.
- A placement move tracker has been introduced to enable management oversight of performance.
- Instruction has been issued to all workers that all proposed placement moves must be discussed and agreed with a Head of Service.
- Instruction and guidance has been issued to all workers to ensure placement codes are correctly input onto Liquidlogic.
- Instruction and guidance has been issued to all workers and IROs to highlight the need for placement planning meetings to be held where placements are deemed to be fragile and at risk of disruption.
- Instruction and guidance has been issued to all workers and IROs to highlight the need for disruption meetings to be held in a timely fashion for those LAC who have experienced a disrupted placement to ensure learning is taken forward.
- There will be an analysis of those foster-care allegations that have been made to determine if there are any lessons to be learnt in their management to ensure least disruption to the LAC.

2. Ensure there is a whole system approach to supporting LAC

- This can be evidenced by the transformation work-streams for the Edge of Care, Education, Foster-Care Marketing and In-House Residential Provision.

3. Effective diversion from care and early intervention. Investing in early intervention to prevent breakdown in the family, robust gate-keeping processes and effective rehabilitation processes to return children home when safe to do so

- This can be evidenced by the transformation work-stream for the Edge of Care.

4. Strong tracking and case planning to avoid drift and achieve permanence

- A permanence tracker has been introduced to enable management oversight of performance.

5. Increased placement choice to ensure there is a sufficient range of high quality accommodation for LAC within the area

- This can be evidenced by the LAC Sufficiency Strategy action plan that is in place and being implemented.
- This can be evidenced by the transformation work-streams for Foster-Care Marketing and In-House Residential Provision.

6. Increased multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support to placements and increased partnership with foster-carers

- This can be evidenced by the LAC Sufficiency Strategy action plan that is in place and being implemented.
- Schools have been requested to highlight those LAC who appear to be in fragile placements to Children's Social Care. This will ensure that a wrap-around package of support can be put in place in a timely manner.

7. Enable children and young people to fully participate in decision-making

- Work needs to be undertaken on building the Children in Care Council to ensure a wider cohort of views from LAC and Care Leavers can be routinely gathered to aid in decision-making and service development.
- Complaints made by LAC and their feedback to be routinely analysed to inform both practice and service development.

8. Disruption Meeting

- There must be an independently chaired disruption meeting held for all long-term placements that disrupt. This will enable lessons to be learnt and further strategies adopted to support young people in their placements going forward.

9. Stabilise the current cohort of LAC who meet the criteria for this indicator

- All children and young people with a plan for long-term fostering to be matched where appropriate as this will further enhance their sense of "belonging."

10. Enhance training and support in dealing with allegations

- Given one of the themes that has emerged from this analysis is in relation to allegations made against foster-carers and children not returning to placement once the investigation has been completed, training and support needs to be enhanced to ensure allegations are managed with least disruption to the child while ensuring the child is safeguarded.

11. Enhance training and support in dealing with challenging behaviour

- In this LAC cohort there was only 1 young person aged 11 who had to change placement on account of their presenting behaviour. Young people with complex needs require a "wrap around" package of support to enhance their placement and to minimise the risk of disruption.

12. Consistency of Practice with Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

- In 2 of the section 47 strategy meetings held concerning foster-carers, there was not a separate strategy meeting held involving the Designated Officer. However, there was evidence of the involvement of the Designated Officer when the standards of care allegations were investigated against the foster-carers. Therefore, the Designated Officer practice needs strengthening to ensure consistency of practice in relation to allegations made against foster-carers.

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