

5 December 2013		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Report on Placement Stability for Looked After Children and Young People		
Report of: Roland Minto – Service Manager, Placements and Support		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Accountable Head of Service: Barbara Foster		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton		
This report is: Public		
Purpose of Report: To inform members of the Committee on current and recent performance in maintaining placement stability for looked after young people.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 That the members of the Committee note the current performance of the authority regarding the Placement stability of looked after young people.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1** Placement stability is widely recognised as a major contributor towards positive outcomes for looked after children. This is reflected in many ways, including their educational performance, the consistent provision of relevant healthcare, and their longer term emotional well-being. Local authority performance in this area is generally measured against two key indicators

- NI 62 considers the percentage of young people with more than three placement moves since April 1st. Good performance is low.
- NI 63 measures the percentage of children who have been looked after for 2.5 years who have been in their current placement for more than 2 years. Good performance is high.

- 2.2 There are many factors which contribute towards the stability of a child's placement, including their age at the time of becoming looked after, the availability of the most appropriate resource in the first instance, the clarity of the planning process, and the prompt resolution of Care Proceedings. Additionally the availability of appropriate support services, and timely interventions to support foster carers can make a significant difference.
- 2.3 Slightly surprisingly the national figures reveal a general pattern that children below the age of one year often experience more than one placement, which is explained by a combination of factors, such as families being referred to Residential Family Centres for assessment, young babies being placed in emergencies, young mothers being unable to sustain parent and child foster placements, etc, as well as the fact that a positive move to have a child "placed for adoption" still counts as a placement move.
- 2.4 However from the age of one year to ten placement stability tends to increase each year, but then deteriorates again from the age of eleven. National statistics also confirm that children who enter the care system over the age of thirteen were more likely to experience placement moves than those who reached the same age but were initially placed when younger.
- 2.5 Comparative data for local authorities for 2012-2013 is expected to be released imminently. However we do have cumulative data for the five year period from 2007-2008 to 2011-12, from which we can draw some comparisons about Thurrock's performance.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 A "Data Pack – Improving Permanence for looked after children" was released by the Department of Education in September 2013, using the cumulative data mentioned above. It highlights that in the last of these years 67% of looked after children nationally had only one placement in the year. Thurrock's performance for that year was reported as 72%, which reflected an above average performance.
- 3.2 However it is acknowledged that there will be some children and young people for whom placement moves will be necessary, for a variety of reasons. Sometimes this is part of a positive decision to progress the longer term plans for their care, but on other occasions it may reflect the inability of a particular placement to meet their specific needs or indeed manage their challenging behaviour. In either case the clear obligation is to contain such moves to the absolute minimum, and the indicator most often cited is the 3+ moves within a year, as crossing this threshold is generally seen as a sign that stability is not being achieved.
- 3.3 Thurrock's performance against this indicator for the five year period reveals that after what appears to have been a particularly turbulent year in 2007-2008, we have generally been broadly in line with national averages:

NI 62 Stability of placements 3 or more placements in year

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 reported
Total 3+	35	20	30	20	20	30
Total CiC	205	220	235	210	240	273

Thurrock (% 3+)	16	10	12	10	9	11
England (% 3+)	12	11	11	11	11	
Statistical Neighbours	13	11	11	10	11	

Based on data available from April - October 2013 we are anticipating a marginally improved performance for 2013-2014, although mid year figures may actually be an unreliable guide to end year performance.

The table also illustrates the significant rise in overall numbers, which again broadly reflects the national trend. Given that the increased numbers do pose a significant challenge in identifying appropriate placements, being able to maintain reasonable stability does represent a success, though it remains to be seen whether this is replicated by other Local Authorities.

- 3.4 The other indicator mentioned (NI63) presents a more complex picture. This focuses on a more specific cohort of young people, who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years and assesses whether their current living arrangements have been stable for the last two years (in acknowledgement of the fact that placement moves often occur early in a child's care experience, which then settles down).
- 3.5 Our recent performance here appears more disappointing.

The table below shows Thurrock performance in both numerical and percentage terms for the last five years. It can be seen that over the five year period we have fluctuated either side of the national average. There were 72 young people last year who could potentially have met these criteria, of whom 42 did.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 reported
Total care 2.5+ yrs	70	60	65	55	65	72
Care 2.5+ - placement less than 2 yrs	20	20	20	20	20	30
Care 2.5+ - placement 2+ yrs	50	40	45	35	45	42

Thurrock (% 2+ yrs)	72	65	70	60	67	58
England (% 2+ yrs)	65	66	67	68	68	
Statistical neighbours (% 2+ yrs)	67	67	68	68	69	

However analysing those who actually did or didn't does not reveal any clear patterns, except for the fact that those who had moved tended on average to be older. In some instances where a younger child moved this was part of a planned positive transition, and some older children had planned moves to more age appropriate resources. Unsurprisingly children with disabilities were more likely to be in the stable group.

- 3.6 Projecting forward for 2013-2014 is difficult, although figures to date are similar to the same point last year. This is complicated by the fact that there are potentially 19 young people who may meet the 2 years in placement threshold by 31.3.14, but 14 of the potential group who will become 18 and therefore be discounted from the indicator.
- 3.7 Although overall numbers are rising, we need to recognise that Thurrock's looked after population is still relatively small in comparison to many authorities, and therefore one or two young people, whose challenging behaviour puts repeated pressure on their placements, can have a significant impact on reported performance figures.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 With the imminent release of national data for 2012-2013 we will have a clearer picture of how performance locally compares. However we recognise that being "in line" is not an adequate aspiration, and we want to achieve the best levels of stability we can. We will therefore be conducting an audit of placement moves in the New Year to ensure that we have identified any patterns of avoidable placement endings which can be addressed through changes of professional practice.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

Not applicable.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 6.1 The stability and consequent wellbeing of LAC and care-leavers links directly with the Council's priorities and with the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652466**
kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk

The key financial implication of the report is to note the continuing strain on all budgets for looked after children, and to recognise that in addition to the damaging impact of placement moves on young people, maintaining placement stability is also more cost effective and enables better long term financial forecasting.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
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Lindsey.Marks@BDTLegal.org.uk

The Children Act 1989 is very clear the best interest of the child should remain the paramount consideration, and frequent unplanned moves will rarely meet this stipulation.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
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The local authority has a clear duty to identify and maintain placements that are appropriate to the needs of all children who require them. It would be a major cause for concern if young people from specific backgrounds appeared to experience placement disruption more frequently than others. At present this does not appear to be the case but is something the local authority should monitor closely, so that corrective action may be taken if such a pattern emerged in the future.

7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Data Pack – Improving Permanence for looked after children (DFE Sept 2013)

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1: Response to specific Member request – regarding comparative stability of placement types.

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Appendix 1

A specific request for comparative data on placement stability in relation to Placement types was made by a member of the Committee.

At the time of writing there were 40 children and young people in a variety of residential provision including children's homes, residential special schools and residential family centres.

Of these 5 have been in their placements more than five years, 13 have been in placement between 1 and 5 years, and 22 have been in placement less than a year. Of the recent entrants 5 are older teenagers with significant disabilities who will require on-going provision post 18 from Adult Social Care.

16 young people were currently placed with Connected Persons Foster Carers, of whom the longest has been in placement over 10 years, whilst eight are placements made within the last year.

With other Thurrock foster carers we have placements which began in 2002, and 14 children have been with their current carers over 4 years.

Similarly we have one placement with an Independent Fostering Agency which began in 2007, and a further 7 which are over four years duration.

Regarding the stability of Adoption placements, there has been only one breakdown of a placement for adoption (that is, prior to an Adoption Order being made) in the last four years. There are five other children previously adopted who are currently looked after by Thurrock following a breakdown, though the original adoption may not necessarily have been managed by Thurrock Social Care.

Regarding the stability of Special Guardianship Placements there is limited data available, as this has been available as a legal option comparatively recently, though its use has expanded significantly in the last few years. Long term stability of these arrangements will therefore need ongoing evaluation, though we can confirm there is currently one looked after child in Thurrock as a consequence of such an arrangement breaking down.