

By: Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
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To: Corporate Parenting Panel – 20 July 2016

Subject: **PLACEMENT STABILITY REPORT**

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Divisions: All

Summary: The report on placement stability was requested by the Corporate Parenting Panel as the indications on the Child in Care Performance Scorecard reflected deterioration in placement stability, where children and young people looked after have 3+ placement moves. Analysis of the placement changes for children under 5 years of age where there were more than 3 placement moves was also undertaken. The factors that contribute to and influence placement stability are noted in the report. These issues have been reviewed and there are resultant recommendations and actions being taken.

Recommendation: Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **CONSIDER** the areas for development and **COMMENT ON** the proposed actions to improve placement stability.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The current performance for placement stability is not as expected and is above the Kent target of 10%. The Corporate Parenting Panel requested an update on the issues that might be contributing to this indicator.
- 1.2 The placement stability rates are different across age ranges, with increased placement changes for those young people who are older and in their teens. The Corporate Parenting Panel was concerned about children under 5 years of age and was keen to understand the particular reasons for these placement moves. There is also an impact on placement stability as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) have placement moves, including at the reception centre and their first placement following on from the reception centre.
- 1.3 The impact of school exclusions and part-time timetables is touched upon as this does impact on the resilience of foster carers to maintain placements.
- 1.4 Social work practice has been audited in relation to placement preparation and planning. There are key areas that have been identified where Specialist Children's Services (SCS) can improve and develop. There is statutory

guidance that informs good social work practice and this is being re-launched with clear standards and expectations being outlined for social workers.

- 1.5 Increasing the support to fostering households is in development and needs further consideration. The children and young people entering care can present some behavioural challenges, and recruiting foster carers who are able to manage their care can also be a challenge. An increased support offer to current County Council carers has been considered and should provide incentive for potential foster carers to work with County Council as opposed to considering an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). The recruitment and retention of foster carers will be developed with a focus on increasing placement stability. The offer to foster carers for those children and young people who are the most challenging is subject to an innovation bid. There has also been a pilot in East Kent of wrap-around support to foster carers, where a dedicated respite carer was available to offer day care and respite support to four foster carers who had challenging placements.
- 1.6 Good placement stability is apparent in the disabled children's service. The social work undertaken with placement of children who have disabilities is reflected in the positive placement stability indicators.
- 1.7 In reviewing placement stability there are a number of social work practice considerations. There has been an audit of the processes and information in requesting and planning placements. This has been undertaken by the manager in the Access to Resources Team (ART) and there has also been a review of the placement processes in local duty teams by the Head of Fostering.
- 1.8 The impact of the children and young people who have reduced access to education has also been evaluated to identify what impact this has on placement disruption. This is an area where resources can be targeted to improve practical support to carers so they can care for children. Bespoke educational input can help reduce the pressure on a carer who has a young person at home for a significant period of time compared to if they were attending full time school.
- 1.9 There is good performance in the children with disability service and this can be replicated so that the careful matching is also in place with mainstream fostering.

2. Analysis: Placement Stability

- 2.1 The placement stability indicator is an important measure to reflect the placements and care that a child has experienced. On the whole, stability is associated with better outcomes¹. There has been deterioration in the placement stability indicator for Kent looked after children. In April 2015/16 the indicator reflected that 9.7% or 180 looked after children had had 3+ placement moves; in April 2016/7 this had increased to 12.8% or 296 children having had

¹ Research in Practice March 2014 Making the Right Choices Leaders' Briefing Dartington. [www.rip.org.uk]

3+ placement moves, reducing to 11.7% or 170 children, without UASC inclusion.

- 2.2 UASC placement stability impacts on the indicator as there are 2 placements as a result of the placement process. The initial placement is at the reception centre and precedes the permanent move. A further move will provide a third or subsequent placement move and this happens where there is a move to independent accommodation or semi-independent accommodation.
- 2.3 There is further challenge around citizen children aged over 14. A sample of placements where there has been 3+ placement moves provides a picture of the reasons for the movements. It is apparent that, as young people move towards adulthood, they increasingly spend time away from the placement due to variety of reasons, e.g. with partners, potential involvement with gangs and drugs, as well as presenting very challenging and disruptive behaviours. All of these behaviours can place pressure on the fostering household. Placements for this age group also reflect emergency responses, requiring the use of emergency beds, which can cause the number of placement moves to increase.
- 2.4 Placement moves for under 5s have also been reviewed in detail. There have been some placement moves which could not have been expected at the point at which the child was placed in care. All children under 5 years old had care plans that involved purposeful transitions.
 - A child can be placed with their parents in foster care (parent and child placement), and then move to their own placement when a parent and child placement does not succeed; the child may then experience another move into an adoption placement, this creates 3+ placements.
 - In some cases, children were in care and then returned home to their parents, either through court direction or rehabilitation. They then re-entered care and were placed for adoption; or, following a return home, they returned to care and did also subsequently move foster placements.
 - Older children aged between 2-5 years had placement moves because foster carers were finding their behaviour difficult to manage.
- 2.5 Virtual School Kent (VSK) monitor the educational attendance of looked after young people and ensure there is early intervention with those young people who are struggling with school attendance (ie achieving below 85% of full attendance), at risk of being excluded or subject to part timetables. VSK is reviewing the engagement with high risk young people to ensure that the most vulnerable children are identified (those at risk of missing from placement and also those who may be at risk or suffering Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)) and appropriate resources are available to support educational attainment. The resources should provide increased intervention as part of the wider team around the looked after child.

- 2.6 The period prior to a child entering care provides time to consider appropriate matching; this time should be utilised to ensure the first placement is the most appropriate placement. Receiving a child into foster care is one of the most important events in childhood and it needs to be carefully planned with information provided to foster carers.
- 2.7 When a placement is experiencing challenges, and is at risk of disruption, there are procedures which need to be implemented, including placement stability meetings and disruption meetings. These key meetings should provide an arena of support for learning and development. Foster carers can articulate what they need to continue to provide care; disruption meetings should create an opportunity to learn more about the young person and also provide the foster carer with an understanding of the child's needs and how these can be addressed. A key area is to also ensure placement endings are planned so that carers and young people end and transition from a placement in a positive way.
- 2.8 The innovation bid is an offer to Kent Foster carers which includes psychological support, delivered through the adolescent teams, and includes use of our outdoor centres. The offer is to develop and provide support to whole fostering households, not only looked after children.
- 2.9 The fostering service is delivering a programme to support foster carers in managing challenging behaviour. The 12 week Fostering Changes programme supports carers to build resilience and develop skills to persevere with particularly young adolescents.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Following on from further analysis, a number of proposals have been made:
- A continued focus on placement stability to ensure that the social work task is supporting and ensuring that children and young people are receiving appropriate services. At the pre-placement stage, ensuring there is preparation of carers and the matched child and also the post-placement support through placement planning meetings and the use of delegated authority. There is continued focus on improving practice and ensuring there is appropriate matching and placement planning prior to entry into care.
 - The team around the child to work together, ensuring that there is a coherent offer to foster carers and the children in their care. The support offer to ensure that the whole fostering household, including birth children, benefits.
 - The innovation bid is further developed and submitted for Department for Education approval. The model of supporting foster carers with a respite foster carer who links with named children to offer a package of day respite.

- The appropriate assessment and information regarding the child is available for the carer; the information about the carer is available for the child at the point at which the placement is made.
- The social work practice to be developed with a training programme on matching and fulfilling statutory responsibilities for care planning for children in care.
- Supervision to ensure that there is clear care planning in place and that foster carer supervision is in place with strategies for managing challenging behaviour.
- The virtual school provide an integrated offer to children and young people who are missing out on education that supports foster carers and enhances access to educational development.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Recommendation: Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **CONSIDER** the areas for development and **COMMENT ON** the proposed actions to improve placement stability.

5. Background Documents

None

6. Contact Details

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