

**Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE,
Interim Director of Children's Services**

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	23 January 2019
Subject:	Permanence and Placement Stability

Summary:

The Corporate Parenting Panel has oversight of issues pertaining to children who are cared for by the authority and reviews a number of the key performance indicators relating to children who are looked after. At a recent corporate parenting meeting held in October 2019 the issues of placement stability was raised. A request was made that a report be prepared for the panel setting out issues relating to the performance data for placement stability. There was also a request to provide information as to what impact placement resources has had on the placement stability. This report is prepared in response to the information request.

Actions Required:

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are invited to consider the update on Permanence and Placement Stability, endorse the work being undertaken and highlight any recommendations for future consideration.

1. Background

The issue of permanence is defined in the statutory guidance that accompanies the Children Act 1989 as providing children with

'a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity ... a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond' (DCSF, 2010).

It is achieved via placement stability.

Placement stability is measured by 2 performance indicators which are as follows:-

NI062: This indicator measures the percentage of children looked after with three or more placements during the year. Temporary or respite placements not exceeding 7 days are not considered as placement moves, recognising the importance of respite in enabling foster carers to recharge their batteries and sustain placements.

NI063: This indicator measures 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 last for at least 2 years.

Although no longer a key indicator, the service continues to report upon the number of children aged between 10 and 16 looked after in foster placements or placed for adoption as indicative of placement availability.

Before going on to address the specific performance indicators, it is important to point out that the data itself can at times belie the reality. So whilst generally placement stability as measured above can be viewed as a positive factor for children who are looked after, some moves which children experience, will serve to decrease placement stability whilst providing very positive outcomes for children. For example, if a child was to return back to the care of a parent this may be a positive outcome for the children, however this would be reflected as a placement move within the data return. For this reason, caution does need to be exercised when looking at the data. What is particularly important is to understand the individual children and their stories as indicated above. Some moves can be highly beneficial to children and young people.

The percentage of children who are looked after with three or more placement moves in a twelve month period. (NI062)

The performance has remained steadily below the national average 11% within Lincolnshire and was at 7% at year-end (2018/19). For many children entering care, this suggests that as an authority we are getting the matches right and that these placements effectively meet the needs of children. However, this indicator has come under pressure over recent years compounded by 2 issues, a reduction in the core number of foster carers mainly for personal reasons and the complex behaviours manifested by children requiring placement.

As an authority we remain very mindful that there are an increasing number of children who are struggling to operate within a family environment. The reasons for this are multi-faceted and included children feeling unable to accept new families; children having experienced such high levels of trauma that they have vulnerabilities which mean carers are often not able to manage some of the presenting behaviours. We also have an ageing foster carer population and retirement and illness have resulted in the loss of many "career" carers. Recruitment activity remains a priority but fails to attract the numbers and the expertise required to care for some of this group of children. The number of children aged 10 -16 in foster carer has reduced from 87% in March 2016 to 82% in March 2019.

There is a growing number of younger children who are unable to manage within foster care and experiencing placement breakdowns. We are mindful of the impact upon the child of repeated placement breakdowns which serves to damage their self-esteem. As a result we take a proactive approach and review the circumstances of the child who experiences 2 placement moves in 6 months and

have recognised that for some children, the level of placement stability can increase through residential placement rather than foster care. The limited number of beds within our own provision has meant the need to place children in out of county placements. From April 2015, the number of children in OOC residential has risen from 21 to 29. As long as we continue to see children who have experienced high levels of trauma and loss we believe that this pattern will continue.

The percentage of looked after children (aged under 16) who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years and have remained in the same placement for at least two years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement together last for at least 2 years (NI063)

The key ambition for any child is to provide them with stability. Lincolnshire has fully embraced Staying Put and there are at present 58 young people who have been able to remain with their foster carers post 18. This is an important backdrop to the performance of this indicator.

Whilst on the face of it this looks like a positive indicator the stories behind the data are important in terms of providing a full comprehension. It would be easy to assume that where a child has been in placement for two and a half years and experienced a placement move after the two year time frame this would be a negative indicator. However, there are times that these will be moves back to parents or the wider family network.

The updated Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations published in 2015 allowed for there to be less oversight of placements. This included 6 monthly visits and a reduced review pattern. Within Lincolnshire we made a decision that this is not the way that we would want to progress. Our experience has been that stable placements can disrupt very quickly and it is important that we continue to offer high levels of support to sustain placements. The development of future4me and caring2learn services, reinforce the emphasis given to supporting both children and foster carers alike.

In order to further support placement stability the family finder meeting which takes place monthly has been expanded to actively review children who have had more than two placements in a six month period. This meeting includes a range of professionals from different service areas and has sought to ensure that placement, carer and children are all supported through the use of targeted work.

2. Conclusion

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to consider the update on Permanence and Placement Stability, endorse the work being undertaken and highlight any recommendations for future consideration.

3. Consultation

a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

N/A

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Background Papers

This report was written by John Harris, who can be contacted on 01522 554109 or John.Harris@lincolnshire.gov.uk