

IMPROVING PLACEMENT STABILITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

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Report Summary:

Purpose:

This report seeks to make members of the Corporate Parenting Panel aware of the publication of the Department for Education's Data Pack Improving permanence for Children in Care. It provides a brief summary of the key findings of the pack and where data exists draws comparison with Milton Keynes.

Background:

The data pack was published in September 2013 and further information can be found on the website <http://www.thisistheurl.co.uk>.

Corporate Priorities:

Improving placement stability and permanence contributes to good outcomes for Milton Keynes' Children in Care. This is in line with the council's Children & Families - Priority 4: To develop and maintain effective interventions that prevent the most vulnerable children and young people in our communities from experiencing additional difficulty and prevents them from suffering significant harm.

Performance Information:

Two main Indicators are reported on each year.

- The percentage of children looked after at 31 March with three or more placements during the preceding year.
- The percentage of children under 16, who had been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years at 31st March and were living in the same foster placement for at least 2 years,

Equality and Diversity Impact:

Placement stability impacts on the outcomes of young people from across the Milton Keynes' community including young people from a range of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. While no specific or unique issues are identified in relation to these groups the service needs to ensure that sufficient secure placements and appropriate placements are available to meet the diverse needs of all the children and young people in the Council's care.

Recommendations:

That the report be noted.

FULL REPORT

Data Pack

Improving permanence for looked after children

It is evident from data that a significant number of children in care experience too many placements. Research shows that repeated placement breakdown or the frequent moving between home and care increases the likelihood of the child developing multiple problems, becoming more challenging and needing high cost placements.

In order to assist local authorities in understanding the issues the Department for Education (DfE) introduced a data pack at the end of September 2013 that it intended to:

- Provide greater detail about placements for CIC and those who return home.
- Illustrate key factors that contribute to placement stability for CIC.
- Inform strategic and operational decisions taken by Directors of Children's Services, Lead Members, and all those involved in designing and delivering services to children in care.

The data pack acknowledges that achieving permanence is multifaceted. Children need to experience not only physical permanence in the form of a family and a home but also a sense of emotional permanence and the opportunity to successfully build a strong identity.

Providing permanence relies on identifying the right type of placement for the child early in their care journey. Local authorities should provide a range of placement options and routes to permanence to ensure that the right placement is available for every child.

In addition to remaining in care with a long term foster family or finding a new permanent family through adoption, special guardianship or residence order. Local authorities are encouraged to pursue other routes to permanence for children including a return to their family following a period in care or returning to other family carers under a formal or informal arrangement.

Annual data returns show that a small number of children still experience multiple placement moves each year. In addition children returning home to their families without the support and the services they need may result in further abuse or neglect and re-entry to the care system.

The current published data focuses on the number of placements in the year and the number of children returning home following a period in care. This data provides a national benchmark and opportunity for local authorities to understand what factors may contribute to placement breakdown.

The data pack explores how placement stability can be monitored and reviewed to provide a more accurate reflection of how stability is achieved and includes details on numbers of placements, length of time in placements,

placement types and age groups. It identifies that a child's legal status may also impact on a child's sense of permanence.

Key Messages from the National Data Pack

The 2011/12 Statistical First Release (SFR) showing placement stability was first created in December 2012. The 2012/13 SFR has not yet been received so the information used in the Data pack relates to 2011-12.

Placement Moves at 31st March 2012 highlight that:

- 67% of all looked after children had one placement in the year.
- 89% of all looked after children had up to two placements in the year.
- 11% - of children experienced three or more placements in the year.
- 6% of all children in care had 3 placements
- 3% of all children in care had 4 or 5 placements
- 1% of all children in care had 6-9 placements.

The data set also seeks to consider the placement data against additional factors in an attempt to identify factors that may impact upon and inform placement stability strategies. These include:

The numbers of placement by age of children

The age a child enters care can impact on placement stability. Teenage entrants to care are the least stable group for a variety of reasons. Teenagers are likely to have strong attachments to their birth families and they are also more likely to have complex needs and present challenging behaviour. This group of young people is therefore more likely to require specialist provision and intervention which are not always available, creating pressure on carers, and often resulting in placement breakdown and multiple moves. Other age related factors may impact on stability such as the transition to secondary school. A better understanding of these issues will help Local authorities to improve placement stability.

The data pack reviews placement stability by the age a child enters care and identified that those who entered care aged 13 and over were more likely to have more than two placements in the year compared to children who enter care younger.

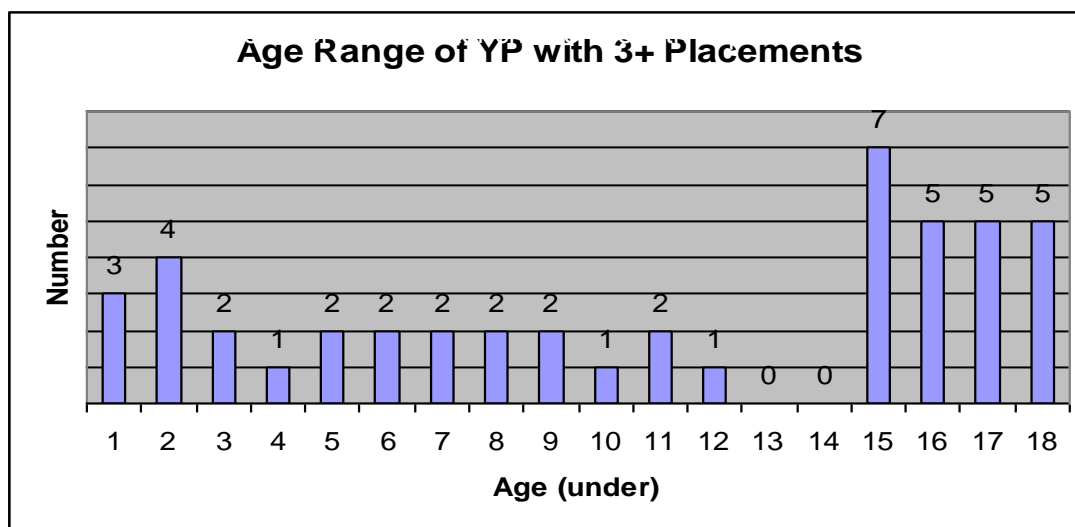
Key messages

- Children under 5 and over 15 were the least likely to have had just a single placement during the year.
- Of the young people who moved placement 10 or more times in the year 96% of them were 13 years of age or over.
- 22% of children aged 13 or over had three or more placements during the year compared to 9% of children aged under 13 on admission.

Local Observations

In 2011/12, 46 children and young people of the 280 who were in the care of Milton Keynes Council on the 31st March 2012 experienced 3 placements or more.

The following table shows the age range of those 46 children. As in the national data two distinct bulges are identified. Of the 46 young people, 9 (19.6%) were below 4 years of age and 22 (47.8%) were aged 13 and above.



The numbers of placements by reason for entering care

The reason a child enters care can impact substantially on placement stability. The largest group to enter care is those who have suffered abuse or neglect. Many need access to specialist or intensive support and all children in care need skilled, knowledgeable and well supported carers. The key messages from the national data to reasons

Key messages

- Just over half (52%) of those entering care as a result of socially challenging behaviour remained in the same placement.
- Children who started to be looked after due to socially unacceptable behaviour were the most likely to have had three or more placements during the year, with 23% experiencing at least three moves.
- 10% of those children who moved placement because of socially unacceptable behaviour had between 4 and 9 placements in the year.
- 14% of children who entered care due to family dysfunction were likely to have 3 or more placements and they represent a quarter of all the children who had 10 or more placements.
- The most stable group was those who entered care due to disability with 83% remaining in the same placement throughout the year.
- 1% of children with disabilities had at least 6 placements in the year.

Local Observations

The 22 children aged 13 and above in the Milton Keynes cohort who experienced 3 or more placements, accumulated 78 placements moves between them in the reported period. While some of these moves were positive in terms of young people moving to independence or returning home the majority related to placement breakdown and challenging behaviour. The placement moves can broadly be categorised as follows:

• Youth Offending Institutions	3
• Placed with parents or Friends & Family	6
• Moved to independence.	5
• Periods of missing from care	4
• Foster placements breakdown	52
• Moved to residential care	8

The 9 children under 4 who had three or more placements accumulated 32 placements between them. These placements can be broadly categorised as resulting from the Councils family support ethos and attempts to maintain children within their families.

• Emergency	7
• Placed with Parents on ICO	2
• Placed with Friends & Family	7
• Mother & Baby assessment	5
• Planned move	11

MKC and the family courts seek to place children within their wider family wherever possible, including placement with parents where this is a safe short term option during care proceedings. In line with this approach, children are initially placed with parents or friends and family or in assessment placements. While this approach is successful for many, some do not remain with family carers and come in to care having technically already experienced a placement move within care.

The MKC family support ethos means that children are intensively supported at home for longer periods, which may result in MKC's relatively low population of CiC including a higher proportion of children and young people with more complex or challenging needs.

The number of placements by region and local authority

National patterns of placement stability were fairly consistent. Regional and local authority data on placement stability demonstrates that the vast majority of children experience no more than two placements during the year and less than half of authorities (67) had children with 10 or more placements in a year.

SSDA 903 Return September 2012	CIC	Percentage with following number of placements in Year 2011/12					
		1	2	3	4 or 5	6 to 9	10 or more
Bracknell Forest	100	68	22	6	x	x	0
Brighton and Hove	485	61	25	7	5	x	x
Buckinghamshire	370	75	15	6	2	x	x
East Sussex	620	62	29	6	3	x	x
Hampshire	1,105	62	22	7	5	2	1
Isle Of Wight	160	71	17	7	4	x	0
Kent	1,800	64	21	7	4	2	3
Medway Towns	445	68	21	5	5	x	0
Milton Keynes	280	58	26	9	6	x	0
Oxfordshire	450	61	28	6	5	0	0
Portsmouth	300	70	20	4	2	3	x
Reading	240	66	23	7	3	x	0
Slough	170	67	24	4	x	x	0
Southampton	430	70	20	4	3	2	x
Surrey	805	67	21	8	3	1	0
West Berkshire	125	61	33	x	x	0	0
West Sussex	675	64	24	7	4	x	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	95	68	22	6	x	x	0
Wokingham	70	58	29	x	x	0	0
South East Average	8,720	65	23	7	4	1	1
England average	65,520	67	22	6	3	1	x

Key messages

- Of the 152 local authorities, there were 85 with no children with 10 or more placements.
- The North West, London and the South East are the regions with the highest percentage of children who experience 10 or more placements in a year.
- The South East average of 13% of CIC with three or more placements is higher than the national average.

Local Observations

In 2011/12, 46 children and young people of the 280 who were in the care of MKC on the 31st March 2012 had three placements or more. A move includes all placements of 24 hours or more, whether intended as temporary or not, and includes periods of unauthorised absence from care. Of these young people:

- 9%. had three placements,
- 5.5% had four placements
- 1.44% had five or more placements
- MK did not have anyone with 10 or more placements

Placement stability and length of placement

Looking at placement stability over a single year provides a useful snapshot about movement in the care population on both a national and local level. It does not provide information about how children experience placement stability over a longer period of time. The data pack explores placement

stability in the context of length of time in care and placement type with the purpose of considering how a child's age, legal status and placement type might impact on stability over a longer period.

The factors considered in the data pack analysis include:

- Length of time in care with length of time in placement under and over 5 years
- Child's age
- Child's legal status
- Placement Type – Foster placements including a sub set of friends and family carers, residential care

Foster Care

Of the 67,050 children in care at 31st March 2012 75% (50,260) were cared for in a foster placement. Of these 15% (7,370) were looked after by a Friends and Family carer.

Although foster care is recognised as an important route to permanence there is currently no legal definition of long term foster care so it is difficult to understand how many children are in this type of placement or to identify which type of children are likely to secure permanence through this route.

Key messages

- The data demonstrated that long term foster care provides stability for a significant minority of fostered children. 17% of all fostered children between the age of 5 and 18 years had been in the same foster placement for more than five years with only 1% accommodated under section 20.
- 20% of children placed with friends and family care had been in the same placement for more than five years, compared to 11% of those with non-related foster carers.
- 89% of children who had been in the same placement for more than 5 years were under care orders, 8% were accommodated under section 20 and 3% were subject to other legal status.
- Just over half (56%) of those young people who were 16+ who had been looked after under a care order and in care for more than five years had been in the same placement for more than five years.
- 74% of children placed in Friends and Family carers were subject to a care order compared to 25% on section 20. This is different when looking at those who stayed in the placement for more than five years where 94% were subject to a care order and only 5% accommodated under sec 20

Local Observations

Milton Keynes Council has the majority of its children in care placed in foster homes. On the 31st March 2012, 213 (76%) were placed in foster care 160 of which were placed with in house carers.

While permanency options such as adoption, SGO and residence orders are robustly pursued and are increasing a significant number of children remain in long term foster care.

Currently Milton Keynes seeks to secure improve stability within these placements through where ever appropriate seeking to matching these as permanent placements either through the Fostering Panel or the Child Care Review if the child is 14 or over. This activity is monitored and tracked by the manager through the permanency tracking forum

The last 18 months has also seen a significant increase in the use of friends and family members being assessed and supported as foster carers by Milton Keynes Council. Today there are 38 children being looked after within 26 friends and family carers. This it is believed will impact positively on our stability performance in the coming years.

Children's Homes

For some young people children's home will be the right placement option. A significant proportion of looked after children placed in children's homes are teenagers. This reflects the differing needs of older children as well as the fact that many older children have expressed a preference to live in a children's home.

Being placed in a children's home will provide some young people with the stability and security they need to enable them to thrive and for some it provides the very specialist care needed before they can live in another family or community setting and for some children's homes provide the stability they need to prepare them for transition to adulthood.

Key messages

- On the 31s March 2012, 9% (5930) of children in care were placed in children's homes.
- 59% of children in children's homes were placed under section 20.
- Children placed in children's homes under a care order are more likely to have been in care for over 5 years but no more likely to remain in the same placement for more than five years.

Local Observations

MKC Placement Stability Performance

There are two Indicators for placement stability:

The percentage of children looked after at 31 March with three or more placements during the preceding year.

Measurement: The percentage of children looked after at 31st March with three or more main placements during the year. Good performance is indicated by a low percentage

This indicator is an important measure of the stability of care that a child has experienced. On the whole stability is associated with better outcomes. Proper assessment of a child's needs and an adequate choice of placements to meet the varied needs of different children are essential if appropriate stable placements are to be made.

In March 2012 15% of children had experienced three or more placements within the year and this remains an area of challenge.

Milton Keynes has been seeking to improve performance in this area through a number of measures. A monthly permanency tracking forum has been introduced at which senior manager's track and monitor both permanency planning and placement moves for all looked after children. A quarterly stability group considers themes and trends in our data and considers the learning from placement disruptions. Placement stability has become a priority in Social Workers planning and Practice

The number of young people with three placements or more in a year remained at 16% in March 2013. However, the picture at the half way point of the year 2013-14 looks more positive and it is believed the activity and focus on placement stability is impacting.

On 30.09.2012 the number of children experiencing three plus placement moves was at 7.24% compared to 4.68% at the half way point this year (2013-14). In addition we have been tracking these figures on a rolling 12 month basis and the numbers of children experiencing placement moves has been steadily declining from 45 in April to 34 in October.

The percentage of children under 16, who had been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years at 31st March and were living in the same foster placement for at least 2 years

Measurement: The percentage of children under 16, who had been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years at 31st March and were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption. Higher percentages indicate good performance.

Placements break down because they are not sufficiently well-matched to children's needs, or of sufficient quality, or because they are not well supported. Placement breakdown has a significant impact on children's wellbeing and disrupting their education and access to other key services. Milton Keynes performance has continued to be a cause for concern and in March 2013 was just above 51% significantly below our neighbours and the national average.

An analysis of the 2011/12 cohort in Milton Keynes identified that a significant number of these moves related to positive moves, such as an increase in the numbers of children being adopted or moving to other permanent placements including returning to birth or wider family members.

The half year figures for this indicator in September 2013 of 70.2% compared with last 63.1% in September 2012 also suggest improvement in this area.

Conclusions:

The introduction of the DfE Data pack provides a welcome opportunity to develop a meaningful data set that will develop greater understanding of the factors impacting on performance. This can then be used to inform future strategy and practice.

The Pack is starting to unpick the interdependencies and connectivity between the service wide factors that impact on placement stability. It will allow direct comparison of performance and identify beacons of good practice.

In order to take full advantage of this Milton Keynes will develop a data dashboard specifically around placement stability that can be reported on a monthly basis to inform management action and practice while mirroring the national data pack.

We will also seek to undertake an analysis of the data and activity, in related areas such as policy and practice around children returning home and the links with placement stability.

We will review our approach to the use of local residential care for teenagers and seek to strengthen placement support both for those in troubled placements and children returning to their families