Department for Education

Children's services statutory returns suppliers' and LA focus group joint meeting

22 July 2014 (London); 23 July 2014 (Sheffield) Chair: Alan Brooks (DfE)

Contents

1 Introduction

Gerard Hassett (London)/Alan Brooks (Sheffield) opened the meeting and thanked LA, Software Supplier and Ofsted representative (London) for attending.

These notes are in addition to the presentation slides used during the meeting, which will be available at [Meeting notes on web](#)

2 Actions from previous meetings

2.1 Outstanding Actions from January 2013 meetings

Action point 8: DfE to confirm when guidance on change to LA placement will be published. Raised as an AOB item, an LA mentioned on-going conflict in the CLA system between the old LA social care codes and current LA codes. Graham Knox said he would investigate if the LA in question emailed him with details.

Update: No details received. Action Closed.

2.2 Actions from July 2013 meeting

Action point 1: Another LA asked if the scorecard data which will be shown in the CLA system will be 3 year average or single years. DfE undertook to answer this after the meeting.

Update: Both a 3 year average and data for single years were presented. Action closed.

Action point 2: Feedback from the pilot exercise would be sent out to all LAs (if this was agreed by the pilot LAs themselves).

Update: The pilot was limited in scope, due to the small number of LAs involved and it's timing– most police forces and LAs did not have the new definitions in place at the time of the pilot. Feedback was therefore not circulated.

Action point 3: Another LA commented that the guidance lacks clarity, Jessica asked the LA to identify the parts of the guidance that needed improving so changes can be made.

Update: No details received. Action Closed.

Action point 4: Outcome of discussion in relation to the following question to be confirmed: Can LAs return accommodation or activity as not known, separately from Residence Not Known?

Update: If the local authority is not in touch with the care leaver and no information is known about their activity and accommodation, please record '0' for both. If the local authority is in touch with the care leaver, but their accommodation is not known, please use 'R Residence not known'.

3 Children's social work workforce collection (Mark Pearson)

3.1 Presentation

The 2012-13 reporting period was the first year we collected the statutory Children's Social Work Workforce data collection. We published the findings in March this year. With a 100% response rate this is the first time we have a fully representative picture of the Children's Social Work Workforce in English local authorities. We have since done some thinking about what we would like to collect on future collections as well as obtaining feedback from LAs.

The first part of the presentation covered the purposes of the workforce data collection and the 2012-13 findings.

We have agreed the following additional variables with the Star Chamber Board:

The following variables are voluntary in 2013-14 but will be statutory in 2014-15:

- Number of children's social workers in your local authority of which with direct case management or over sight
- Age of children's social workers
- Time in service at LA of children's social workers
- Number of agency workers covering vacancies

The following variables are voluntary in both 2013-14 and 2014-15:

- Origin of starters
- Time in service at LA of leavers
- Destination of leavers

The following variables are not required in 2013-14 but will be *voluntary in 2014-15*:

- Age of starters
- Age of leavers

We are likely to request all the above variables on a statutory basis in 2015-16. We are considering the possibility of collecting information at worker level in future collections as well as what other data sources might be available to us, eg data held by the regulator.

The 2013-14 collection covers year ending 30 September 2014 and will be commissioned at the end of September with an end of November deadline. 2014-15 will be similar.

We will be holding reference groups about this collection, please contact Mark if you wish to be a part of these.

3.2 Discussion

LAs seemed generally content with the approach taken. Mark asked for some feedback on the following:

- Which variable would authorities be in the best position to provide on a statutory basis by September 2016; and which will cause more difficulty?
- How do you envisage this collection developing (eg worker level as in the school workforce census)?

Mark would welcome further feedback on these questions. Discussion at the meetings was as follows:

An individual level return seemed to be welcomed as long as there was clear guidance provided. This data would be easier to validate, and LAs had the data in any case.

Definitions of caseloads needs clear guidance eg definitions of workers who are/are not allocated caseloads.

Several LAs commented that they worked with qualified social workers who were provided by an agency ie the agency was paid, not the workers directly; others had set up `safeguarding hubs' where social workers (some provided by an agency) worked on cases before a formal assessment. These kind of cases required clear guidance in terms of inclusion.

Another LA commented that their structure meant that several social workers may be involved in one case – and it was difficult to decide which was the `lead'.

Mark was grateful for the examples of cases where it was difficult to decide who to include in returns. It was clear that LAs had different practices and that caseload data needed to be considered carefully (eg part time workers don't have full caseloads). Mark said that guidance material was currently being worked on by the Department.

4 Adoption leadership board quarterly adoption survey (Mark Pearson)

4.1 Presentation

This was a verbal update on the new quarterly adoption survey.

Mark thanked all of those who provided a return for the latest quarter (quarter 4 2013-14, January to March) and for bearing with the teething problems whilst the responsibility for the collection transferred from DfE to the ALB.

The response rate was 79%, a promising improvement on 69% in quarter 3 2013-14. The ALB are hoping to reach 100% in future quarters.

The [data pack presented to the ALB and agency level data](#) were circulated around agencies at the end of June.

The quarter 1 2014-15 (April to June) data was commission by the ALB on 8th July.

We are grateful for your feedback and comments on the collection as well as the new outputs we have published. We will be holding reference groups about this collection, please contact Mark if you wish to be a part of these.

4.2 Discussion

An LA commented that their issues were related to timing and level of detail. These issues clashed with other collections eg Ofsted. Mark apologised for these issues, and said the Department were working with Ofsted to see if they could be alleviated.

5 2013 to 2014 discussion on children in need (CIN) Statistical First Release (SFR) tables – new data items (Alison Butler)

5.1 Presentation

This session gave an over view of the likely tables which would be published on the three new data items collected in 2013/14. Tables were circulated at the beginning of the year. **Source of referral**: A table for referrals identifying the source, by LA. The lower level categories will be grouped to reduce level of suppression if needed.

Factors identified at initial assessment and continuous assessment: Two tables will be published by LA, showing the factors at each type of assessment. However, there may be issues with the initial assessment table as a number of the LAs who moved to continuous assessments in the 2013/14 year had identified they did not collect this information for initial assessments.

Child seen by social worker: A table by LA, showing the numerator, denominator and percentage.

Attending LAs were also asked if they were content with the working days banding we were planning for the continuous assessments table, ie

- Started ended same day,
- 1-10 days,
- 11-20 days,
- 41-45 days,
- 46-50 days,
- 51-60 days,

This follows a similar pattern that used previously in the core assessment table.

5.2 Discussion

Working day banding for assessment tables:

LAs were content to keep the banding of days in tables the same for initial assessments for 2013 to 2014 as previously, and acknowledged that the breakdown was the same as previously also for core assessments. Alison provided a hand out to present breakdowns for continuous assessments. LAs seemed content with this.

New data items:

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Three new data items had been introduced for the 2013 to 2014 census, and proposals for outputs had been circulated in March/April. `Referral source' and `seen by social worker' seemed to have been adopted well. However, `factors identified at assessment' had caused more difficulties. For example, an LA said there had been error messages created because some factors were handled outside of the statutory care service. Alison commented that LAs had had sight of proposed factors, but said that if LAs let her know of issues (again with a short email) – the department would see if error messages could be improved.

Alison commented that in many cases both initial and continuous assessment data would be incomplete (due to the transition to continuous assessments by many LAs within the year). In many cases LAs only started recording `factors identified at assessment' when they moved to continuous assessments. Alison asked for thoughts on combining the data into one table showing factors identified at both initial and continuous assessment for 2013/14 due to the data incompleteness. Discussions highlighted that we expected the data to show different factors depending upon whether it was an initial or continuous assessment completed so it was agreed to continue with separate tables for 2013/14.

LAs wondered about the possibility of introducing a `factor not recorded' option. This would be used if there were eg technical issues encountered. Alison said that if there were problems it was best to contact the department to discuss them rather than clear errors somehow, for example, by using the 'other' category as this would distort analysis of the data.

An LA commented that sometimes factors were not recorded by social workers. They felt it was right that social workers should be concentrating on the assessment themselves. Alison said that, again, issues should be reported to the department.

An LA was concerned about how whether a child on a child protection plan had been seen by a social worker according to the timescales in their plan would be presented in tables. They felt that LAs may vary in how they counted this data, and that a consistent picture was not always presented. It was felt that health warnings should be placed on this data. Alison said that accurate data should always be returned to the department – but that if there were issues LAs should send a short email to her and these would feed into considerations.

Another LA said that there were large variations in whether a child was seen by the lead social worker, or another social worker – and a `yes/no' answer is not always easy. Alison said if there was doubt a short email could be sent to explain the interpretation used and that the department would assess the data received for future considerations.

An LA said that if they left pre 1 April child protection plan data blank, this generated an error. Alison felt this shouldn't be the case.

A question was asked about errors arising where S47 dates do not match other assessment dates. An LA wondered if this could be made a query instead of an error. Alison said that this was possibly only a problem in the 2013 to 2014 census (ie transition to continuous assessment) and any future issues would be considered. LAs should not amend dates to clear queries.

There was a long discussion about what actually was being counted as `children in need'? Alison said she would check definitions with policy colleagues and assess the data with this in mind. However, it was generally agreed that there may be different approaches to inclusions within and across LAs and that approaches may change as different types of case emerge.

6 Children in need (CIN) census changes 2014 to 2015 (Alison Butler)

6.1 Presentation

This was a reminder of the changes for 2014 to 2015. The only change is that there will no longer be an initial assessment and a core assessment module. All assessments will need to be returned in the 'assessment' module. Further details are provided in the 'Data Structure' section on page 10 of the 2014 to 2015 guide.

LAs were also given the opportunity to suggest any changes to the COLLECT reports for 2014 to 2015.

6.2 Discussion

An LA asked if `child ID' could be added to reports. Another asked about the approach whereby a separate table was added to the CSV converter to accommodate `Risk Factors'. Jessica Vickerstaff reported that this was the optimum technical solution available to address performance issues.

Action point 1: CIN working group to consider if there is a viable technical option to be developed.

7 Feedback from the SSDA903 2013 to 2014 collection (Louise Feebrey)

7.1 General review/feedback (including performance table indicator discussion) - presentation

Louise began by acknowledging that the collection has been particularly frustrating this year and expressed her gratitude to all LAs who have provided feedback throughout the process. This has enabled us to work with LAs all as much as possible to resolve the issues that have arisen.

In terms of background/explanation, Louise explained that there were a number of changes to the collection this year, the indicators being the most complex one. When we started to test the system internally there were several issues that needed to be resolved. We prioritised those that related to data input and validation rules to ensure that the system could go live at start April. However, we also found a number of issues with the Indicators, which, due to the detailed methodologies involved, required extensive work to re-develop and re-test.

We hadn't fully appreciated the impact the delay to these would generate. There are a total of 16 indicators in the children in care and adoption performance tables, and only 3 or 4 of these were in the system last year and the previous year. So it was our original intention in including the indicators in the system, to be helpful to LAs, providing a tool to enable additional sense-checking prior to data submission.

However, the 903 is quite unusual in this respect – the Department publishes a number of Statistical First Releases for which the statistics are not seen by the data providers prior to publication, or certainly, at the point of data entry.

We closed the data collection knowing that a few of the indicators were incorrect: on Monday 7 July there were 3 out of the total 13 indicators that we knew still weren't working after internal testing (including the reviews indicator, which doesn't feature in the performance tables and is not published in the SFR). These all required further development and we felt that it would be unhelpful for LAs to prolong the collection further still whilst these were fixed. We made this decision on the basis that that:

- The 903 is primarily a data collection system. There are an extensive number of validation rules and reports within the collection system which LAs can use to satisfy themselves their data are clean and accurate. These are in addition to the reports that can be generated by the LAs own management information systems. Nearly all LAs had clean data at 7 July.
- The actual process of producing the indicators later in the year will not be impacted in anyway by the issues we have had with the system. The indicators are calculated based on raw data extracts taken from the system after the database

has closed. The issues we had this year related to the development of the indicators within the collection system. LAs, as in previous years, will be given a chance to view their indicators prior to publication.

In terms of next steps, we will be giving this further thought over the coming months, including with ADCS following their feedback. We'll also be improving the documentation available for LAs so you can more fully understand the methodologies used in the performance tables.

Louise thanked LAs and opened the item up for discussion/feedback.

7.2 General review/feedback (including performance table indicator discussion)

LAs provided extensive feedback in relation to how they use the performance indicators, and suggested improvements around communications.

In relation to the indicators, LAs said they found some of the communications confusing, as there were still a number of performance indicators that did not work where DfE had indicated they did. Louise explained that the internal testing suggested they worked but accepted that internal testing cannot always pick up every scenario. Therefore, it was suggested that the LAs own internal reports should be considered as the most appropriate check that the data are accurate. There was some discussion about the use made of the indicators by LAs, who said that they found the indicators helpful to as a true test of 'accuracy' rather than just whether the data is 'clean. LAs also noted that the CLA MI and DfE systems do not always `map together''.

There was some discussion about checks on the SFR and performance tables. Louise confirmed that, as usual, LAs would be able to view the data for the performance tables in advance. LAs felt that two weeks checking time would be adequate, and early notification of those dates would be extremely helpful.

Action point 2: CLA analyst officers to ensure that LAs receive advanced warning about performance table checking timings.

LAs also asked whether it would be possible to check the SFR prior to publication – but it was confirmed that SFRs were not generally made available for extensive checking, as there is a need to publish official statistics as soon as they are available. LAs said that particularly because of the issues encountered in the 2014 collection they felt they needed to know the background methodology and have assurances about it. Clarity about this was very important – especially when they were preparing senior managers for the publication. Louise stressed that the process for calculating the SFR and performance indicators is completely separate from the calculation of the indicators in the system and will be the same as in previous years. Louise undertook to ensure a clear description about methodology used for the performance tables will be provided.

In relation to communications, LAs provided helpful feedback on a range of issues. In particular, a strong preference was expressed for verbal communication rather than e-mail/service request forms during the collection period, as it was felt that issues could be resolved more quickly and easily than via e-mail. LAs felt that a phone service would enable quicker resolution of issues, and a clearer explanation of the guidance, would avoid LAs needing to 'second guess' interpretations which could cause inconsistencies. Issues were also discussed in terms of the prioritisation of queries; updates on progress; the nature of advice provided; and the value of courtesy calls.

Louise said that the process itself was similar for all departmental collections but appreciated the feedback and would take this back.

Note: issues about communication were discussed within the department after the focus group meetings. The following are some ways in which issues are to be addressed at time of writing:

General: CLA analysts and helpdesk staff will be meeting to discuss issues overall. The Helpdesk handles around 40,000 customer enquiries per annum employing a number of methods of communication (including web chat and online forums) with very few complaints. However as part of our commitment to continuous improvement we will investigate what can be done to mitigate this.

Response times: Changes to the CRM system have already been commissioned to improve the management, control and timeliness of customer requests. In the interim, monitoring of the call management process will be improved so that enquiries nearing response deadline can be proactively identified and escalated. In line with the department's 'Digital by Default' strategy, comprehensive web guidance is published and supported by web chat, online forums and service requests. Online feedback forms are also available so we can gauge effectiveness and use that to inform improvements.

Submission of several forms and perceived lack of prioritisation: It would be helpful if LAs could provide specific examples so this can be investigated further. Every service request completed results in a confirmation Email and these can simply be forwarded (with a brief statement summarising the issue) to Alan Brooks who will send to the Helpdesk for investigation.

Process for further advice and communication method: The actions being taken above should help. Helpdesk staff are advised that if a customer enquiry is unclear then a telephone call may be required to clarify the requirement. That guidance will be reiterated. The CLA collection will transfer to a revised online forum for next year which should help. Specific examples would help so this can be further investigated.

Service request form system: The procedures/enhancements we are putting in place will alleviate issues, but the position will be kept under review and changes made in line with our policy of continuous improvement.

An LA said that they would welcome being involved in testing performance indicators. Louise welcomed this and asked LAs to contact her if they would be willing to take part in this in the future.

LAs asked whether it would be possible to get the CLA system earlier ie COLLECT for the CIN census was available in January 2014. Louise explained that the CLA cycle has some very tight timescales but welcomed the feedback and agreed to give this further consideration for future years. LAs also requested that the CLA system was available for longer. Louise thought this would be possible and since the meeting it has been agreed and communicated to LAs that the CLA 2014 system will now remain open as read-only until **Friday 9 January 2015.** This follows feedback indicating that local authorities would like the facility to download reports and CSV files until this date.)

A supplier commented that for the CIN census they have the opportunity to test XML, and wondered if this could be done in a similar way for CLA. Jessica Vickerstaff said that this may be possible using a dummy LA ID and test data. However, she did not think that this would be possible for year on year data. A supplier added that they would be willing to help set up dummy LA IDs, and that it would be of help to them if the CIN and CLA technical specifications could be published at the same time. Louise advised that we are planning to release the CLA return guide and technical specification much earlier this year than in previous years, in response to previous feedback from LAs.

Action point 3: CLA analyst officers to contact suppliers if help setting up dummy LA IDs was required.

There was then some discussion about the care leavers report (OC3), which was unavailable until the last week of the collection. Louise accepted that this had caused frustration for some LAs and explained that an extension had been granted in light of this. Jessica confirmed that any notes provided on the commentary as part of the first submission of data would still be present/available to the DfE.

Several LAs requested an extension to the CIN 2013 to 2014 census deadline given the issues with the CLA collection. Alison and Louise said they were happy to consider issues on a case by case basis.

7.3 18 year old care leaver voluntary collection – presentation

Louise thanked all those who returned data – we had a very high return rate – and explained that the information will be very helpful for us to understand the sorts of numbers of young people who are 'staying put' with their former foster carers at 18, and monitor trends over time going forwards.

Louise clarified the information required as there had been some confusion. Information was required on all of those who left care on their 18th birthday in the latest year and who remained with their former foster carers at the point of leaving care.

This collection will run again as a spreadsheet return next year (2014-15) but will no longer be voluntary. In the following year (2015-16) it will be collected as part of a wider change to the care leaver cohort.

7.4 18 year old care leaver voluntary collection – discussion

LAs had no comments to make.

7.5 New look system – presentation

Louise noted that the CLA system had a 'new look' interface this year and asked whether LAs had any feedback on it.

7.6 New look system – discussion

No specific comments were received in relation to the new look interface. However, an LA commented that they could not see all threads for a topic at once on the CLA discussion forum. Louise felt this could be addressed by use of the wider DfE forum used for other collections. (NB: After the meeting a requirement to remove from the system has been made for 2014-2015 and it is planned for the CLA to go onto the collections forum. A CLA page will be set up in advance of the 2014-15 collection on the DfE collections forum (http://www.education.gov.uk/drupal/) along with additional guidance on the use of the forum.

7.7 Confidential placements for children placed for adoption (postcodes) – presentation

Louise started by confirming that for this year (from 2013-14) home and placement postcodes were required for children placed for adoption. In the past we have not collected this data and LAs were able to record the LA of placement as 'confidential'. However, it was agreed with the Star Chamber in 2012 that these postcodes will now be collected (and therefore distance and LA of placement information will be calculable) and we will include this in our aggregate level analysis.

Louise noted there had been some concern about the confidential nature of the postcode data. She reassured LAs that all the personal and identifiable data that we collect on children looked after is treated with extreme care and we ensure that when publishing the data, a child can not be identified from the tables. In that sense, this is no different- we will ensure that the confidentiality of the individual information is maintained.

In terms of how the data will be used, Louise explained that some sense of distance placed is of interest to policy makers because it helps us understand how widely LAs are searching when matching children in their care to prospective adopters. It also gives us

an indication as to how many children are likely to be subject to the 3-year rule regarding post-adoption support. This is the rule that transfers responsibility for post adoption support from one LA (the one that was responsible for the child when he/she was in care) to the LA where the adoptive parents live after 3 years.

Louise asked whether LAs felt the category of 'CON' (confidential) for LA of placement is still actually necessary in the database, and if so, under what circumstances would it be used?

7.8 Confidential placements for children placed for adoption (postcodes) – discussion

There was a mixed response in response to the `confidential' category. Some LAs saying they did not have access to this data; one saying they had to write to adopters to ask for it. Some others said that they did not hold the data and that it was held by the adopters team separately.

There was a discussion about DfE now using the post code to derive `distance'. LAs asked whether DfE could store post codes so they could be downloaded from the system as they were needed again by LAs for Ofsted.

Action point 4: DfE to look into making postcodes downloadable in the CLA system.

LAs commented that there were situations where the post code is genuinely (correctly) not available eg refugees, serious crime, forced marriages. Also cases where addresses themselves were not available eg asylum seekers, abandoned babies. LAs needed a way of recording these cases without it being counted as an error. Louise noted that in the case of asylum seekers and abandoned babies, the home postcode and distance would not be available but the LA of placement and placement location (in/out) should still be returned.

Action point 5: DfE to check validation around postcode, distance, LA of placement and placement location to ensure there are no issues when home/placement postcode aren't available.

8 Tables for September and December children looked after (CLA) statistical releases (Jessica Vickerstaff)

8.1 Presentation

Our team has been reviewing the content of our Statistical First Release (SFR) with internal policy colleagues and have agreed the following changes. We wanted to use the focus groups as an opportunity for LAs to provide feedback on the tables they considered useful, and those which they perhaps did not use.

Removing:

- Table A8 – Participation in reviews (since decided to keep this table)
- Table B2 – Respite
- Table C4 – Started to be looked after by placement (since decided to keep this table)
- Table F2 – Care leavers by gender

Adding:

- New placements starting in the year by distance from home (following the collection of postcodes for all placements for the first time, rather than just for placements at 31 March)

Changing:

- Table C1 – Started to be looked after by characteristics – adding information on previous permanence arrangements ,level of detail will depend on size of numbers involved
- National and LA level tables on care leavers – changed to reflect new cohort and addition of 20 and 21 year olds

8.2 Discussion

It was reported that the first SFR would be published in September (confirmed after the meeting as 30 September and communicated to LAs); the second in December, date to be confirmed. A schedule of the Department's releases can be found here under 'Forthcoming Publications': https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/statistics

Performance tables are likely to published in November/December – but LAs asked for advanced warning of this. The tables are not counted as `official statistics' and are not on the `schedule'. However, the following link to where they are published on line was

promised: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-care-and-adoption-performance-tables-2013

LAs asked for advance knowledge of formulae, rules and what counts as LAC. Definitions used in the SFR tables will be provided in the accompanying documents to the September release. An LA commented that they wanted the LA codes to be present for CLA as for CIN. Jessica felt this would be possible. These will be included in tables for the September and December releases.

Action point 6: CLA analyst officers to ensure LA codes are in tables for September and pDecember releases.

LAs made some comments on proposals to **remove** some tables:

Table A8 (method of participation in reviews): There was a view that the `child's voice' was high profile at the moment. Also, it was questioned whether the proposal was to not publish or not collect at all. Louise replied that the idea was that the table would be removed this year, and if there was no significant adverse opinion, then the data would not be collected next year. It has since been decided to keep this table.

Table B2 (respite): No objections to the removal of this table.

Table C4 (started to be looked after by placement): Two LAs commented that they used this table and found it very useful. It has since been decided to keep this table.

Table F2 (care leavers by gender): LAs again thought this table was useful and that table F1 did not give gender. Louise and Jessica said they would look at this. The gender table did not show any large differences between outcomes for males and females, therefore this table will be removed.

Action point 7: CLA analyst officers to review the removal of Table F2 (care leavers by gender).

LAs also commented on proposals to **add** new tables:

Looked after in a new placement by distance: It was confirmed that this would be at national and LA level.

Care Leavers: This maybe broken down by age but there would be no year on year data as the cohort this year is different to the previous cohort. It is likely that the national data will be broken down by age; but the LA data will only show totals.

There was a general discussion about `care leavers'. LAs asked for clearer guidance about care leavers who returned home after six months. Some LAs were including these cases and some were not. This was linked to cases where children were only receiving `advice and assistance' from services (there were small numbers of these but LAs still had a confusing decision to make). LAs knew about these cases, but they were not in the

system and this meant more work for social workers. Jessica noted the issue and said that for this year the data would be heavily caveated when published and revised, clearer guidance will be issued shortly for the 2014-15 collection.

Action point 8: CLA analyst officers to ensure clear guidance about `care leavers returning home after six months' is provided.

An LA felt that the age breakdowns were different to those for CIN. Jessica felt they were the same, but undertook to check. NB After the meeting it was confirmed that age breakdowns are the same for CIN and CLA (Under 1, 1-4, 5-9, 10-15 and 16 & over) with the exception of CIN including an unborn category.

9 Missing from care 2014 to 2015 (Louise Feebrey)

9.1 Presentation

We're collecting data for the first time in 2014-15 on children who were 'missing from care' or 'away from placement without authorisation' (for any period of time – not just over 24 hours) in a new module in the 903:

The definitions are:

- **Missing from care**: a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (eg school) and their whereabouts is not known.
- **Away from placement without authorisation**: a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

9.2 Discussion

Louise asked three main questions:

- Are there any problems with recording children against the definitions? Are the definitions understood?
- Are there any issues in working with the police on data for missing children? Are you attempting to reconcile your data with police data?
- Any other feedback from the data you are collecting on the new module in the 2014 to 2015 collection?

Discussion ranged on these questions:

An LA asked whether the new definitions would affect other areas. Louise replied that codes M1, 2 and 3 would no longer be used.

There seemed to be general agreement with an LA who said that they had struggled to get data from police authorities other than their own – and that their approach was collect their own data and compare it to police data where possible. There was a discussion about how software systems would deal with this. One LA felt that if a module was produced it might duplicate systems they already had in place. For many LAs, systems were the issue rather than understanding the definitions.

In response to LAs, Louise confirmed that guidance already advised on what to do if a placement involving a missing child spanned collections. Louise also felt that removing codes M1, 2 and 3 from the placement stability performance indicators this year (ie 2013

to 2014) was probably unlikely, but obviously they will not appear from 2014 to 2015 when these codes are no longer collected.

Louise agreed that some issues would need to be worked through. Length of absence was, as always, an issue as to when does the time start for a `missing' episode, and who makes the decision (social worker, carer, police)? A supplier noted that depending on the definition, there could be multiple instances in one day.

10 Changes to the SSDA903 2015 to 2016 collection (Louise Feebrey)

10.1 Presentation

Change to care leavers cohort

This year we changed the care leavers part of our collection, to capture activity and accommodation information on 19th, 20th and 21st birthday, instead of just the 19th birthday which we had done in the past. We also changed the cohort so that it was in line with recent guidance about those eligible for care leaver support.

In 2015-16, we will extend this collection further, to capture activity and accommodation information on care leavers at their 17th and 18th birthday, as well as their 19th/20th/21st birthdays.

Reason for new episode- extension of codeset

Currently, there are 4 'reason for new episode' codes, but we plan to extend this to 6 codes to enable us to distinguish between placement moves which involve a change of carer and those which do not. The current 'P' code (used where reason for new episode is a change of placement will be split:

A **change of placement** happens when a child moves to a new placement, even if this does not require using a different placement type code (eg moving from one foster carer to another). **This will generally involve a change of address and carer.** Where a child moves house with their carer, this is not considered to be a change of placement.

A **change in placement type only** is one where a new episode has to be created because the placement code has changed (eg from short term to long term foster care or when a child becomes 'placed for adoption' with foster parents) but the child remains with the same carer, ie there is no change of placement. In most cases the child will remain in the same location, however this also includes the situation where a foster carer moves house to a different local authority and the child moves with them. It could also include the situation where the provider type changes but there is no physical move or change of carer for the child (eg child's foster carer was IFA but becomes LA foster care). **(The crucial thing is that there is no change in carer**).

Note – following feedback from the focus groups the wording of these have been amended slightly so that the 2 new categories are 'change of placement (ie carer) only' and 'change of placement (but same carer) only'. Full guidance for this change and the extended codeset will be issued at end September.

Reason for placement change

From 1 April 2015, for all episodes that end due to a change in placement or placement type, we want local authorities to record the primary reason for the placement change,

Reason for placement change codes

New Codeset

- **Change to/Implementation of Care Plan:** This code would be used where the change of placement is a planned part of the child's care plan and will be a move to a placement that meets the child's assessed needs on a temporary or permanent basis. The key factor is that planning takes place and the decision is recorded in the child's care plan **before** the move takes place. This would include moves from short to long term foster care or where a child is placed under FFA which does not lead to adoption and the child moves onto a long term foster care arrangement with a new carer. It also includes movements to semi-independence. The nature of the change in plan will be monitored through the placement codes before and after this move. Changes in the status of a placement should also be given this code, eg if a foster placement becomes long term but the child does not actually move. In these cases the "reason for new episode" code will indicate that the child is still living in the same place.
- **Resignation/closure of provision:** This code would be used where a child has to be moved because a foster carer decides to resign or the setting closes eg children's home. This code would be used in a planned move not in an emergency.
- **Allegation (s47):** This code would be used where a child has been removed from placement because of an allegation which is being investigated under s47 (CA 1989).
- **Standards of Care concern:** This code would be used where a child has been removed from placement by the responsible authority or provider as a result of concerns about standards of care. This does not mean a child protection investigation (s47) but a formal process followed by the provider.
- **Approval removed:** This code would be used where a setting is no longer approved/registered with the appropriate statutory body (eg Ofsted).
- **Carer requests placement end due to child's behaviour:** This code would be used where because of the child's behaviour the placement has broken down or disrupted, and the carer has asked for the placement to end and the child to be moved to another placement.
- **Carer requests placement end other than due to child's behaviour:** These codes would be used where it was intended that the placement was a short or long term arrangement but has broken down or disrupted and the carer [foster carer, residential unit or connected person] has asked for the child to be moved to another placement.

- **Child requests placement end:** This code would be used where it was intended that the placement was a short or long term arrangement but has broken down or disrupted and the child has asked to move to another placement.
- **Responsible/Area authority requests placement end:** This code would be used where it was intended that the placement was a short or long term placement but the responsible authority has decided that the placement no longer meets the child's needs.
- **Other:** Any other reason not captured above

Note that this codelist has been revised slightly since the focus groups and the revised list will be circulated at end September.

Reason for out of area placement

For new episodes triggered by a change in placement or placement type, we want local authorities to record the reason for any out of area placement. The following code list was presented to LAs and feedback requested:

- Specialist need, no suitable provision within authority
- Within authority provision fully utilised – specialist therapeutic need or particular disability
- Within authority provision fully utilised- no specialist therapeutic need or particular disability
- Safety
- Other

Note that following the feedback from LAs, it was felt that further work was required in relation to these codes in order to ensure that useful information can be generated. Therefore this will not be implemented in 2015-16.

New data item – URN of placement

- For each ongoing placement at 1 April 2015, and each subsequent placement, where the placement is a setting inspected by Ofsted, we would like LAs to provide us with Ofsted's Unique Reference Number for the placement. Eg for children's homes this would be the URN of the individual home, and for foster placements this would be the URN of the fostering service the foster carer works for. Where placements are of a type or in a setting not covered by Ofsted URNs, such as placed with parents, or in a YOI, then the field should be left blank.
- Using this information alongside the Ofsted data will enable us to have richer information on a child's placement (eg quality, size of placement). It should also improve the accuracy of the placement type information we get – our analysis indicates that sometimes placements are miscoded (eg children's homes and residential special schools).

- Ofsted will provide an up to date list of URNs for LAs to use throughout the year, ensuring it includes all settings open at some point during the year.
- Our intention is that the list of URNs in operation throughout the year will be loaded into the SSDA903 system to enable validation of the data on entry by LAs (we still need to think about how this will work in practice).
- Initially this requirement would be in addition to the current SSDA903 requirements on placements but we hope to be able to streamline the requirements once this new data item is bedded in (eg placement location).

Note: information on this new data item was circulated to LAs and software suppliers in late August. If any LAs/suppliers have any questions we would welcome the feedback – please raise a service request.

10.2 Discussion

Louise confirmed that the changes discussed relate to 2015 to 2016, and not for 2014 to 2015.

Extension of care leaver data to 17 and 18 year olds: Data for 19 to 21 year olds had already been introduced, but from 2015 to 2016 activity and accommodation data would be collected for 17 and 18 year olds.

Reason for new episodes: LAs asked for a brief note on this – which Louise said she would provide. LAs asked about the interpretation of historical data – but generally felt the codes would be OK. LAs did , however, ask for clear definitions eg about changes for those living independently; about changes of details for foster care agencies where the actual care placement had not changed; and carers moving very locally. This would all impact on the view given of continuity of care.

Reason for placement move: It was confirmed that this would not be required where the reason for new episode was a change of legal status, or new starters. There was some discussion around the performance indicators and Louise confirmed that there would need to be a clear definition of what should be included as a placement move in the placement stability indicators, given the new placement types. Currently, for example, `adoption by placement carer' does not count as a placement move. An LA asked whether a move should be recorded from when people became adopters, or when the change was actually made. Louise asked the LA to email her with the question.

Action point 9: CLA analyst officers to ensure there is a clear definition of what should be included as a placement move in the placement stability indicators

Reason for out of area placements: LAs were asked their opinions about these changes and details were sent for comment to all LAs via email after the meeting. At the meeting there was a general discussion:

It was agreed that practices differed across LAs (eg LA or non-LA foster carers), and that the nature of LAs (eg size of LA) may impact on this data. Some LAs may not have suitable placements in their area due to the nature of the LA itself. Some moves may be out of LA control eg a foster carer moves house. There may be specialist services, family or friends location, or threat to the child (eg gang issues) that mean that a placement outside the boundary of the LA is better for the child. Louise undertook to look at what should be recorded if a physical move was made – but the child stayed with the same care provider. It seemed generally agreed amongst LAs that the boundary was not the real issue – as long as the placement itself was for a reason demonstrably to be in the best interests of the child. The codeset should make this clear to LA managers and DfE. LAs wondered if DfE would want to know about why and where those living independently were moving.

Action point 10: CLA analyst officers to look at what should be recorded if a physical move was made – but the child stayed with the same care provider

Placement URN: DfE would still welcome thoughts on how to increase accuracy for URN data, especially for children's homes. There was a discussion about whether there are two URNs – one for residence and one for education. It was agreed that collecting this (and other) data was a lot of work for social workers and they needed support and clear guidance. It was agreed that software suppliers needed as much advanced warning as possible to make required changes.

Action point 11: CLA analyst officers to provide adequate advanced warning about URN (and other) changes.

It was agreed that using Ofsted data would be ideal - both to reduce burdens and for accuracy checks. However, there were timing and security issues to be worked through. Ofsted did provide a monthly update for their data, but this appeared to be very tricky to obtain. Ofsted would ideally be able to provide easily accessible, up to date, central access to the relevant data.

Action point 12: CLA analyst officers to discuss with OFSTED the best way of disseminating URN data, ideally with all the information the LAs required on just the one list.

11 Questions submitted by local authorities (LAs) pre meeting

LAs and suppliers were invited to submit questions for presenters before the meeting, especially if they were unable to attend.

11.1 Children looked after (CLA) indicator, portal and communication issues

Several LAs submitted questions about CLA communications, portal and performance indicator issues. These were addressed generally in the main part of the meeting. Please see section 7 of these notes.

11.2 New fostering codes

An LA asked what action should be taken in line with the fostering codes changing from Q1 and Q2 to U1 to U6 ie retrospective action; change codes midway through placements; or to create new placements? All options seemed to impact on placement stability data.

Update: Revised 2014-15 guidance will be issued shortly to provide further clarification.

11.3 Children in need (CIN) referrals and re referrals

An LA was moving to a new structure which had a single social care and early help service. Individual cases may move between the two. What, in these circumstances, would count as a referral or a re-referral?

The definition of a referral is 'a request for services from children's social care'. Early help cases should not be counted as a referral. The definition of a re-referral can be found on page 8 of the methodology document which accompanies the CIN statistical first release.

11.4 Children in Need (CIN) and Children looked after (CLA) SFR

An LA submitted the following question:

Publication figures: CIN census publishes actual figures but 903 publishes rounded figures – can we have everything as actual figures and not rounded.

DfE responded that CLA numbers are smaller than CIN, so by rounding to 5 this means values can be retained rather than having to apply suppression and secondary

suppression (suppressing the next smallest number so the suppressed value cannot be calculated from the total).

11.5 Access to the children looked after (CLA) site

A supplier said that it was really useful to have access to the CIN COLLECT site in preparation for the census, and wondered if similar access could be provided to the CLA system.

DfE undertook to take this request back and see if this was possible. Enquiries are currently being made with our IT contractors but it should be possible to provide software suppliers with access to the CLA system during the familiarisation period. This question led to a discussion of when DfE systems were available during collections (ie when it was safe for LAs to rely on uploads). DfE advised that this was not a definite time as it depended on what overnight processes had to be run. However, any work done after 6pm was more risky, even though the system was usually available until 8 or 9pm. DfE undertook to see what could be done in the future to provide more advice – and said that if issues were experienced, to report them the next day.

Action point 13: CLA analyst officers to see if access to the CLA system could be provided as part of preparation for the collection.

Action point 14: LAs to report performance issues to DfE ie when working later in the day.

11.6 Foster carer agencies

An LA requested that there should be an option to record where a foster carer had moved from an agency to the LA or vice versa. Currently, only codes PR1 and PR4 were available – and this made this look as though there had been a placement move. DfE had replied before the meeting, that (as suggested) a new code would be introduced into the 'reason for new episode' codeset in 2015 to 2016 which would identify whether there was a change of carer or not, when there is a placement change.

11.7 Indicator definition

An LA asked specifically whether "moving in with its adoptive family" meant the date the placement became a `placed for adoption placement', or the date the child moved to the family as a foster care placement (ie the date they moved in with the family who adopted them).

DfE responded that it was planned to work up more detailed definitions for indicators in future. In terms of the specific question, the correct date is the date the case became a

placed for adoption placement (although the other measure is also calculated as an additional indicator).

11.8 New `in touch' code

Jessica asked attendees if they could foresee any problems with including a new `in touch' code for children who returned home for more than six months after leaving care – as these are not included in the `care leavers' cohort. No issues were raised at the meeting, and Jessica has subsequently polled opinion of software suppliers via email. Feedback is still welcomed from LAs.

12 Attendance Lists

Organisation	Name	Organisation	Name
Local Authorities		Sefton	Sarah Hodgson
Barnet	Elizabeth Timotheou	Sheffield	Robert Campbell
Bexley	Tracey Beeson	Sheffield	Tom Gamble
Bolton	Imran Khan	Solihull	Rachel Robinson
Bracknell Forest	Elizabeth McClelland	Southwark	Rashid Jussa
Bracknell Forest	Sandra Davies	Staffordshire	Craig Woods
Brighton	Daryl Perilli	Surrey	Annette Platt
Bromley	Ailsa Reid-Crawford	Sutton	James Whitfield
Buckinghamshire	Christine Everitt	Tameside	Janet Robinson
Central Bedfordshire	Peter Worthington	Tameside	Andrea Doyle
Cheshire East	Debra Sloan	Thurrock	Bob Mills
Derbyshire	Barnabas Lawrence	Warrington	Helen Lawes
Doncaster	Chris Wells	Wigan	Michelle Winnard
Doncaster	Claire Hinsley	Wokingham	Sarah Robinson
Dorset	Annette Atkinson	Wokingham	Dhirage Gehlot
Enfield	Marc Thompson	Worcestershire	Donna Duggan
Enfield	Yvonne Seville	**Suppliers**	
Gloucestershire	John James	Careworks	Bryan Maguire
Halton	Sue Davies	Corelogic	Pippa Young
Haringey	Adele Cooper	Liquidlogic	Chris Ffelan
Haringey	Margaret Gallagher	OLM	Chris Pina-Eccles
Hartlepool	Kay Forgie	**Ofsted**	Judith Swindell
Hertfordshire	Michael MacAllister	**DfE**	
Hull	Denise Beel	Alan Brooks	Mark Pearson
Kent	Ian Valentine	Alison Butler	Louise Feebrey
Lambeth	Lorna Brown	Jessica Vickerstaff	Adam Whitaker
Leicestershire	Emma Patrick	Andy Brook	Claire French

Organisation	Name	Organisation	Name
Leicestershire	Mark Smith	Katherine Griggs	Tanya McCormack
Lincolnshire	Tim Ware	Brian Addison	Miguel Marques-Dossantos
Manchester	David Carr		
Merton	Naheed Chaudhry		
Merton	Lynne Doyle		
Middlesbrough	Andrew Winn		
Middlesbrough	Jo Hudson		
Milton Keynes	Jane Spencer		
Newcastle	Ann Howard		
Newcastle	Mikael Husband		
Newham	Alison Matthews		
Newham	Avtar Kalsi		
North East Lincs	Antony Shaw		
North East Lincs	Sonia Rides		
North Yorks	Abby Mansbridge-Beard		
Nottingham City	Matthew Thompson		
Poole	Hilary Windridge		
Redbridge	Keith Hurst		

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