Data Pack

Improving permanence for looked after children

September 2013

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Improving Permanence

The Government is committed to improving for permanence for all looked after children. This work includes:

- Reviewing aspects of the statutory framework to ensure that it supports all permanence options and timely decision making for all children
- Identifying and supporting evidence based interventions which drive improved practice and a better quality of care
- Strengthening the framework for children to move into permanence arrangements such as adoption, special guardianship, returning home and long term foster care where this is appropriate

Driving Improved practice

It is evident from data and research that too many children experience too many placements and where children do return home to their families they are not receiving the support they need to ensure that this is successful. Research shows that repeated placement breakdown or moving between home and care increases the likelihood of children developing multiple problems, becoming more challenging and needing intensive, high cost placements.

The purpose of the data pack

Providing security and stability for looked after children must be the primary objective of everyone involved in delivering a high quality care service for our most vulnerable children.

This data pack is intended to:

- provide greater detail about placements for looked after children and those who return home
- illustrate key factors that contribute to placement stability for looked after children and those children returning home from care
- inform the strategic and operational decisions taken by Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members, commissioners, managers, social workers and independent reviewing officers

Achieving permanence is multifaceted. It requires children to experience not only physical permanence in the form of a family they are a part of and a home they live in but also a sense of emotional permanence, of belonging and the opportunity to successfully build a strong identity. Legal status may also impact on children's sense of permanence. In many circumstances children will need support to make sense of being part of two families or to manage complex and sometimes difficult relationships and loyalties.

Providing stability relies on identifying the right placement for a child early in their care journey whilst ensuring that individual and family needs are properly assessed and support services provided in order to achieve early permanence.

Local authorities should provide a range of placement options to ensure that the right placement is available for every child. For many children returning home to their family after a period in care will be the route to permanence. For others, returning to other family or friends under a formal or informal arrangement will be the setting they need in order to thrive. Remaining in care with a long term foster family or finding a new permanent family through adoption, special guardianship or residence orders are other routes to permanence.

While it is evident that achieving timely permanence is desirable, annual data returns show that a small but substantial number of children still experience multiple placements each year. In addition, too many children who return home to their families do so without the support and services they need resulting in further abuse or neglect and re-entry to the care system.

Current published data focuses on the number of placements in a year and the number of children returning home after they cease to be looked after. In isolation, this data provides a national benchmark and key messages about placement instability and children who experience the revolving door of care when return home fails.

Using this data provides the opportunity to understand what contributes to placement breakdown alongside reviewing the policies and practice of those local authorities who are succeeding in achieving permanence by supporting both looked after children within their placements and those who return home to their families.

Contents of the data pack

The pack includes data on two specific areas:

Section two explores in more detail how placement stability can be monitored and reviewed to provide a more accurate reflection of how stability is achieved for all looked after children. In particular this section focuses on:

- numbers of placements, length of time in placement, placement types and age groups, and the impact of high numbers of placements on educational attainment

Section three provides a detailed analysis of children returning home after they cease to be looked after and the factors that may impact on successful and sustainable return home. In particular this section focuses on a detailed analysis of:

- children who returned home after ceasing to be looked after in 2012

- children who returned home during 2006-7 and had re-entered care by 31 March 2012

Current published data

The Department for Education publishes the *Statistical First Release* (SFR) in September each year which provides information about looked after children in England for the year ending 31 March. All figures are based on data from the SSDA 903 return collected each spring from all local authorities in England.

Headline data on placement numbers and placement type is provided in the *Statistical First Release – Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers)* for each year ending 31 March. However this does not provide a detailed analysis of those children who experience larger numbers of placements or the length or number of placements during a child's period in care.

The latest SFR can be found at: http://tinyurl.com/c5ar25z

Interpreting and using the data

This pack provides high level data which is key to transparency and to supporting local authorities to understand their performance in a national context to drive forward improvements in practice.

The data in this pack has been provided to assist local authorities and regions to think about what their data tells them about the local care population and how and why this may differ within and across regions.

There are key questions throughout the data pack that local authorities can use to think about the range of factors that may impact on success in achieving placement stability and successful return home, how to interpret their local data and how to use this to inform service development and commissioning.

How the data is presented

All figures are based on data from the SSDA 903 return collected each spring from all local authorities in England and published in September 2012.

Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten and percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Numbers of five or fewer and percentages based on a numerator of five or fewer or a denominator of ten or fewer have been suppressed and replaced by an 'x'. Figures not applicable are indicated in the data pack by a dot.

Missing from care

Looked after children who go missing from their placement for a period of 24 hours have their missing period included as a placement move in relevant analysis. If a child is missing from care and then returns, this will be included as three separate placements as the placements before and after the missing period are included separately.

The Government is consulting with local authorities about the way they record missing or absent from care. Under these proposals, each episode of a child being missing or absent from care would be recorded in a separate module, and the Department will be able to exclude information on missing children from change of placement analysis accordingly. All episodes, including those lasting less than 24 hours, would be included in the new module.

Proposals for future data collection

Long term foster care

The work on improving placement stability also includes understanding how long term foster care provides permanence for a significant minority of children who remain looked after over a period of time.

The Government is undertaking a broad programme as part of the *Improving Fostering Services Programme* to explore and address the issues and challenges of providing high quality long term foster care arrangements. This work includes a focus on regulatory changes which will drive and support improved practice and will be the subject of a formal consultation in autumn 2013.

A proposal to introduce a formal definition of long term foster care into the statutory framework will enable local authorities to collect information about how this placement options being used to support these looked after children.

Subject to the introduction of the formal definition, the data collection will begin in April 2014 and included in the *Statistical First Release – Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers)* in September 2015. As with all new data collections it is likely to take several years for this data to settle and provide an accurate national picture about the use of long term foster care arrangements as a permanence option.

Section Two - Placement stability

Data is published in the *Statistical First Release – Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers)* on numbers of children who experience 1, 2 and 3+ placements in a year (to 31 March).

Further data on placements at 31 March 2012

- Two thirds (67%) of all looked after children had one placement in the year ending 31 March 2012
- 89% of all looked after children had up to two placements in the year ending 31 March 2012
- 11% - a small but substantial number of children - experienced three or more placements in the year ending 31 March 2012
- Such small numbers should make it possible for local authorities to look at individual cases and address specific issues

Key messages

- The percentage of children with only one placement during the year has increased slightly from 2008 when it was 65 per cent, and from 2011 when the figure was 66 per cent
- 6% of all looked after children had 3 placements
- 3% of all looked after children had 4 or 5 placements
- 1% of all looked after children had 6 to 9 placements

Analysis

This more detailed analysis of placement data provides greater insight into the actual number of children who experience a high number of placements. It is, however, necessary to consider in detail whether there are particular attributes that determine placement instability.

Through considering additional factors it may be possible to establish patterns which will enable local authorities to review their practice and use of support services to reduce placement instability for particular groups of children and young people. We have considered these factors through the following analysis:

- Number of placements by age of children at 31 March 2012
- Number of placements by reason for entering care at 31 March 2012
- Number of placements by region and by local authority at 31 March 2012

Number of placements by age

The age that a child enters care can impact on placement stability. Teenage entrants to care are the least stable group which may be for a variety of reasons. Teenagers are likely to have strong attachments to their birth families, they are also more likely to have complex needs and present challenging behaviours. Many enter care when families need extra support or are unable to cope. This group of young people are therefore more likely to require specialist provisions and interventions which are not always available, creating pressure on carers, sometimes resulting in placement breakdown and multiple moves.

Other age related factors may impact on stability - the transition to secondary school, which can be a challenging time for many children, is one example. A better understanding of these factors will help local authorities to improve placement stability for their looked after children.

The following analysis includes age at 31 March 2012 and the impact on placement stability and considers whether placement stability is affected by the age at which a child enters care.
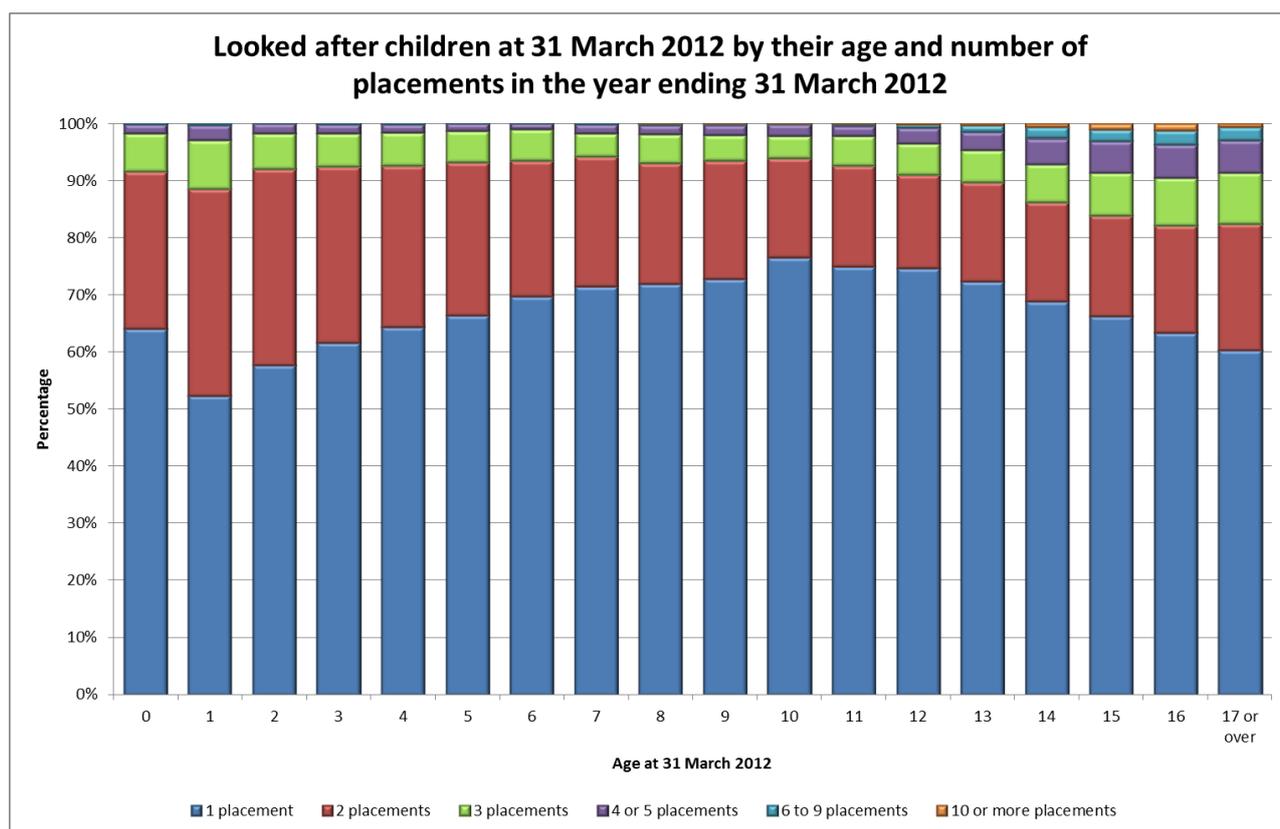
Figure 1: Looked after children at 31 March 2012 by their age and number of placements in the year ending 31 March 2012

10 year olds were most likely to have a single placement – 77 % had 1 placement in the year ending 31 March 2012. This is the peak of the group of 7 to 13 year olds who were the most likely age range to have one placement during the year.

Age	All	Placements					
		1	2	3	4 or 5	6 to 9	10+
All	67,050	44,760	14,910	4,340	2,140	660	240
Under 1yr	4,190	2,690	1,150	280	70	x	0
1 – 4yrs	12,430	7,410	3,940	830	230	20	0
5 – 9yrs	12,700	9,020	2,850	620	190	20	x
10 – 15yrs	24,150	17,240	4,180	1,450	870	300	110
16yrs +	13,580	8,400	2,790	1,170	780	320	120

x   figures not shown in order to protect confidentiality

Figure 2: Number of placements by age in the year ending 31 March 2012

Key messages

- Children aged under 5 and over 15 were the least likely to have had just a single placement during the year.
- 240 young people moved placement 10 or more times in the year ending 31 March 2012
- Of the 240 children with 10 or more placements during the year, the vast majority (230) of them were aged 13 or over

The following analysis relates to placement stability by the age a child entered care. Table 3 shows the age at which children entered care, their age at 31 March 2012 and the number of placements they had in the year to 31 March 2012.

Age at 31 March 2012	All	Age when starting to be looked after				
		Under 1	1 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 15	16 and over
All	240	X	10	40	170	10
Under 1yr	0	0	.	.	.	.
1 – 4yrs	0	0	0	.	.	.
5 – 9yrs	X	0	0	X	.	.
10 – 15yrs	110	0	X	20	90	.
16yrs +	120	X	X	20	80	10

x   figures not shown in order to protect confidentiality

Figure 3: All looked after children with 10+ placements at 31 March 2012

Those children who were 13, 14, 15 and 16yr olds when they became looked after were the groups most likely to have 3 placements or more (13yrs – 21%, 14yrs – 22%, 15yrs – 24 % and 16yrs – 21%)

- Children who entered care aged 13 and over were more likely to have more than two placements in the year compared to children who entered care younger but this was still a minority of children. 22 % of children aged 13 or over had three or more placements during the year compared to 9% of children aged under 13

Number 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 are 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. Lack of a range of placements and the right services can impact on placement stability.

Reason	All	Placements					
		1	2	3	4 or 5	6 to 9	10+
All	**67,050**	**44,760**	**14,910**	**4,340**	**2,140**	**660**	**240**
Abuse or neglect	41,790	28,350	9,300	2,530	1,170	330	110
Child's disability	2,280	1,890	270	80	20	10	10
Parents' illness or disability	2,680	1,880	580	140	60	20	x
Family in acute stress	6,000	3,830	1,310	460	270	90	40
Family dysfunction	9,530	5,880	2,290	730	430	140	60
Socially unacceptable behaviour	1,150	600	280	140	70	40	20
Low income	120	80	20	10	x	x	0
Absent parenting	3,490	2,250	860	250	110	20	10

x   figures not shown in order to protect confidentiality

Figure 4: Number of placements (in the year ending 31 March 2012) by reason for entering care

Of the 62% (41,790) of looked after children who entered care due to abuse or neglect, 110 of these children had 10 or more placement moves in the year ending 31 March 2012. Children who enter care due to family dysfunction were far more likely to have had 10 or more placements – a quarter of those with 10 or more placements and only 13% of those with a single placement.

Key messages

- Of those children who entered care due to abuse or neglect 330 had between 6 and 9 placements. 1,170 (3%) had 4 or 5 placements during the year
- 10% (120) of those children where the reason for entering care was socially unacceptable behaviour had between 4 and 9 placements (6% had 4 or 5 placements, while 4% had between 6 and 9 placements)
- Just over half (52%, 600 children) of those children who entered due to socially unacceptable behaviour remained in the same placement throughout the year
- The most stable group were those who entered care due to disability - 83% remained in the same placement to March 31 2012. However, 1% of this group of children had at least 6 placements in the year ending 31 March 2012

Number of placements by region and local authority

Nationally patterns of placement stability were fairly consistent. Regional and local authority data on placement stability demonstrates that the vast majority of children experienced no more than two placements during the year. While the numbers are very small in some areas, almost all local authorities had children who experienced four or more placements.

Reason	All	Placements					
		1	2	3	4 or 5	6 to 9	10+
All	**67,050**	**44,760**	**14,910**	**4,340**	**2,140**	**660**	**240**
North East	4,110	2,670	970	310	130	40	10
North West	11,360	7,830	2,420	660	310	100	50
Yorkshire and Humber	7,530	5,020	1,750	470	210	50	10
East Midlands	4,740	3,250	1,020	280	140	40	x
West Midlands	8,470	5,630	1,900	590	270	70	20
East of England	6,430	4,410	1,390	380	180	60	20
London – inner	4,560	3,070	970	300	160	50	10
London – outer	5,680	3,710	1,290	370	200	80	40
South East	8,720	5,650	1,970	570	340	120	70
South West	5,450	3,520	1,230	410	210	60	20

Figure 5: Number of placements (in the year ending 31 March 2012) by region and local authority

Although a large majority of local authorities (133) had children with more than five placements in the year ending 31 March 2012, less than half (67) had children with at least 10 placements during the year

Key messages

- Of the 152 local authorities, there were 85 local authorities with no children with 10 or more placements
- At a regional level placement stability broadly reflects the national picture - 3% (2,140) of all looked after children had 4 or 5 placements, 1% (660) of all looked after children had between 6 and 9 placements and 240 had 10 or more placements – the North West, London and the South East are the regions with the highest percentages of children who experienced 10 or more placements in a year

A detailed table which shows placements by local authority is provided at Annex D.

Messages and questions for local authorities

Age, reason for entering care and local area variables are all key factors in determining placement stability.

Local authorities should have a good understanding of their looked after and edge of care populations. This will help local authorities to ensure they have sufficient placements of the right type and quality available to meet the needs of their current and projected looked after and edge of care populations.

Local authorities should identify groups of families with particular needs to ensure that they have a range of universal and specialist services to support young people to settle and thrive in placement or to safely return home.

Local authorities should also look to neighbours to understand what is working well and how learning from the success of others can drive improvements locally.

An effective needs analysis, which is regularly updated, will provide information about the current and projected population to support strategic planning and commissioning.

The following questions could be asked when analysing local data:

General

- What proportion of our looked after population experienced more than 10 placements last year? How does this compare to the previous five years? What do we know about the needs profile of these children and their families?
- What proportion of our looked after population experienced three or more placements last year? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- What are our services for looked after children and their families?
- How has our service provision changed over the last five years? What informed the change?
- What action are we currently taking to improve placement stability?

Age

- Do we understand the age profile of our looked after population in terms of the average age of children entering care and the split across age groups (e.g. under 2yrs, 3 – 6yr olds, 7 -12yr olds and 13yrs-15yrs and 16yrs+) within the current care population? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- Do we have services and/or interventions that target specific age groups – e.g. specialist foster care provision for very young children such as the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care – Prevention Programme for 3 – 6 year olds? If yes, what informed the decision to commission these services/interventions?
- Does our local data about the age and needs profile suggest that we consider exploring the need for age specific services/interventions to improve placement stability?
- Are there children in particular age groups who are difficult to place? Is this due to complex needs and no appropriate local placements/services? What are our current arrangements for out of area placements and spot purchasing?

Reason for entering care

- Do we understand the profile of our looked after population in terms of the reason for entering care? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- Do we have usual services and/or interventions that target children with particular experiences and needs – e.g. specialist services that address parental difficulties which impact on their capacity to parent such as Multisystemic Therapy? If yes, what informed the decision to commission these services/interventions?

Local area

- What local factors might impact on placement stability? These could include areas of deprivation or local housing stock which may impact on foster carer recruitment?
- How do we compare to our statistical neighbours in terms of size of care population, age profile of looked after children and reasons for entering care?
- How are local looked after children's services organised and made available across the local authority area? How might this impact on placement stability?
- How is the goal of achieving placement stability reflected in local policy and practice? How is this monitored?

Placement stability and length of placements

Looking at placement stability over a single year provides a useful snapshot about movement within the care population on both a local and a national level. The data in the previous section illustrates some of the factors that may impact on placement stability for particular groups of children and should help local authorities to think about how they can address these factors.

While this snapshot is useful for comparing year on year data in terms of measuring improvement it does not provide information about how children experience placement stability over a longer period of time. Local authorities are not required to make a data return on the number of placements a child has during their time in care although some do analyse this data locally to inform their planning and service delivery.

This section explores placement stability in the context of length of time in care and placement type. The purpose is to consider how a child's age, legal status and placement type might impact on placement stability over a longer period and what this might indicate to local authorities about how their data could be used to inform system and service development.

The factors considered in this analysis include:

- Length of time in care with length of time in placement – under and over five years
- Child's age
- Child's legal status
- Placement type – foster placements including a sub section on foster placements with a relative or friend (also known as family and friends foster care) and residential care home placement (also referred to as children's homes)

Foster care

The following section provides information about all foster placements including those with a relative or friend. However, specific information on foster care placements with only relatives or friends is provided in the next section.

Of the 67,050 looked after children at 31 March 2012, 75% (50,260) were cared for in a foster placement. Of these children 15% (7,370) were looked after by relative or friend foster carers while 42,880 (85%) children were looked after by other foster carers.

For some looked after children, foster care is the route to permanence and provides the security and stability they need until adulthood. These children may have complex needs, present challenging behaviours and require support to manage complex relationships with their birth families. Foster care enables children to live within a family environment whilst receiving on-going support through remaining within the care system.

Although foster care is recognised as an important route to permanence there is currently no legal definition of long term foster care. It is therefore difficult to really understand how many children are in this type of placement or whether there are particular factors that mean certain children are more likely to find stability and permanence through long term foster care.

The following analysis provides information about those children looked after in all foster care placements at 31 March 2012 who had been both in care and in their current foster care placement for more than five years.

Age		All	Under 1	1 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 15	16 and over
Total		**50,260**	**3,680**	**9,640**	**10,950**	**18,980**	**7,000**
Care order[1]	**Total number of children**	**32,490**	**2,420**	**5,330**	**7,390**	**13,540**	**3,820**
	Care – over 5 years	10,670	-	-	1,020	6,590	3,060
	Placement – over 5 years	5,580	-	-	460	3,410	1,710
Section 20[2]	**Total number of children**	**12,900**	**980**	**1,950**	**1,880**	**4,970**	**3,120**
	Care – over 5 years	890	-	-	40	430	420
	Placement – over 5 years	510	-	-	20	250	240

Figure 6: Looked after children in foster care by legal status and length of time in care and length of time in current placement

Data demonstrates that long term foster care provides stability for a significant minority of fostered children (6,290 children – 17% of all fostered children - between 5 and 18yrs had been in the same foster placement for more than five years. 1% were accommodated under s20)

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[1] A child looked after under section 20 (s20) of the Children Act 1989 is a child accommodated by the local authority with the agreement of those with parental responsibility

[2] A care order is made under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and grants parental responsibility to the local authority but it is shared with the birth parent.

Key messages

- 89% of children who had been in the same placement for more than 5 years were under a care order, 8% were accommodated under s20 and 3% were the subject of other legal statuses
- Just over half (56% - 1,710) 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
- 52% (3,410) of 10 to 15yr olds who were 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
- 52% (5,580) of all children who were under a care order and 57% (510) of all children who were accommodated under s20 who had been in care for more than five years had been in the same placement for more than five years

Family and friends foster care

Children who are placed with a relative or friend who is approved as a foster carer are looked after children. Local authorities provide information about the number of children who are fostered by relatives or friends as part of their data return. At 31 March 2012, 7,370 children were living in this type of placement.

Age		All	Under 1	1 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 15	16 and over
Total		**7,370**	**390**	**1,650**	**1,920**	**2,550**	**860**
Care order	**Total number of children**	5,450	250	1,120	1,460	1,970	650
	Care – over 5 years	2,100	0	0	370	1,190	530
	Placement – over 5 years	1,420	0	0	240	860	320
Section 20	**Total number of children**	**1,860**	**130**	**500**	**440**	**570**	**210**
	Care – over 5 years	110	0	0	10	60	40
	Placement – over 5 years	80	0	0	10	50	30

Figure 7: Looked after children in foster care with a relative or friend by legal status and length of time in care and length of time in current placement.

20% (1,500) of children with their friends or family had been in that placement for more than five years compared to 11% (4,790) for those with other foster carers

Key messages

- 74% of children placed in relative or friends foster care were the subject of a care order while 25% were accommodated under s20. This is very different when looking only at children who had been in the same placements for over five years where 94% were the subject of a care order and 5% were accommodated under s20.
- At 31 March 2012, 2,100 children were the subject of a care order, placed in relative or friends foster care and had been looked after for over five years. Of these 67% (1,420) had been in the same placement for more than five years.
- There were fewer children (110) who were accommodated under s20 in friends or family foster care and had been looked after for over five years. Of these, 76% (80 children), had been in the same placement for more than five years.

Residential care

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

Being placed in a children's home will provide some young people with the stability and security that they need to enable them to thrive. For other children, a placement in a children's home can provide the springboard needed to enable them to return to a more familial environment either in foster care or with their birth or extended family.

For some, it provides the very specific specialist care needed before they can live in another family or community setting. For others, the home provides the stability and support they need to prepare them for transition to adulthood.

A further breakdown of data is overleaf.

At 31 March 2012, 5,930 children were placed in children's homes[3].

Age		All	Under 1	1 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 15	16 and over
Total		**5,930**	**10**	**x**	**140**	**2,980**	**2,800**
Care order	**Total number of children**	**2,330**	**10**	**x**	**80**	**1,380**	**860**
	Care – over 5 years	1,170	0	0	10	600	550
	Placement – over 5 years	40	0	0	x	10	20
Section 20	**Total number of children**	**3,470**	**0**	**0**	**50**	**1520**	**1900**
	Care – over 5 years	210	0	0	x	90	120
	Placement – over 5 years	80	0	0	x	30	50

Although nearly a quarter of children in children's homes have been looked after for over five years, just 2% (110) had been in the same placement over five years

Key messages

- For children who were in the same placement for over five years, 66% were accommodated under section 20 and 34% were under care orders.
- 39% (2,330) of children in children's homes were looked after under a care order compared to 59% (3,470) who were accommodated under section 20.
- At 31 March 2012, there were 2,330 children who were in secure accommodation or children homes and who were under a care order. Of these 50% (1,170) had been looked after for over five years but only 40 had been in the same placement for over five years.
- There were 3,470 children who were in secure accommodation or children homes and who were under section 20. Of these 6% (210) had been looked after for over five years and 80 had been in the same placement for over five years.

Messages and questions for local authorities

To gain a better understanding of placement stability and the impact this has on outcomes for children, local authorities could use a more refined analysis of placement stability for particular groups of children and looking at trends over time. It may then be helpful to understand how the local trends differ for both statistical and regional neighbours and explore the practice that will better support placement stability for children.

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[3] All children in children's homes, hostels and secure accommodation

The following questions could be considered when analysing local data:

- What proportion of your looked after population has been in care for more than five years?
- How many of these children have been in the same placement for this time?
- What proportion of those children who have been in care over five years are looked after under a care order? Does this impact on placement stability?
- In terms of placement type (Relative and friend foster care, other foster care and residential care) – what are the most stable placements over time in your area?
- Do we collect and track the number of placements children have during their care journey or just in a particular care episode? Are there trends for particular age groups or placement types?
- Do you record why placements end? Do you track the reasons over time for individual children, groups and the whole looked after population?
- What are the most frequent reasons for placements ending and does this differ based on placement type (e.g. for those children accommodated under s20 who have been placed with relative and friend carers) or for different age groups?

It may also be helpful to consider these questions for children who have been looked after for three years or more as this will capture those children who entered care as babies or very young children and may still be looked after but not have reached five years.

Linking data on placement stability with data on educational attainment

Research evidence shows that placement stability impacts on other areas of a child's life. The following analysis provides information on matched data for looked after children and number of placements with information from the National Pupil Database on educational attainment at Key Stage 4 (KS4). KS4 is the legal definition for the two years of education that incorporates GCSEs.

This analysis is based on almost 5000 looked after children who were in KS4 in 2012 and had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months.

Placement stability and educational attainment

Children who have had more placements within the most recent care episode are less likely to achieve five good GCSEs than those who have had a single placement.

Local authorities need to make the right placement initially based on the child's needs and avoid disrupting a child's educational placement unless there is a good reason.
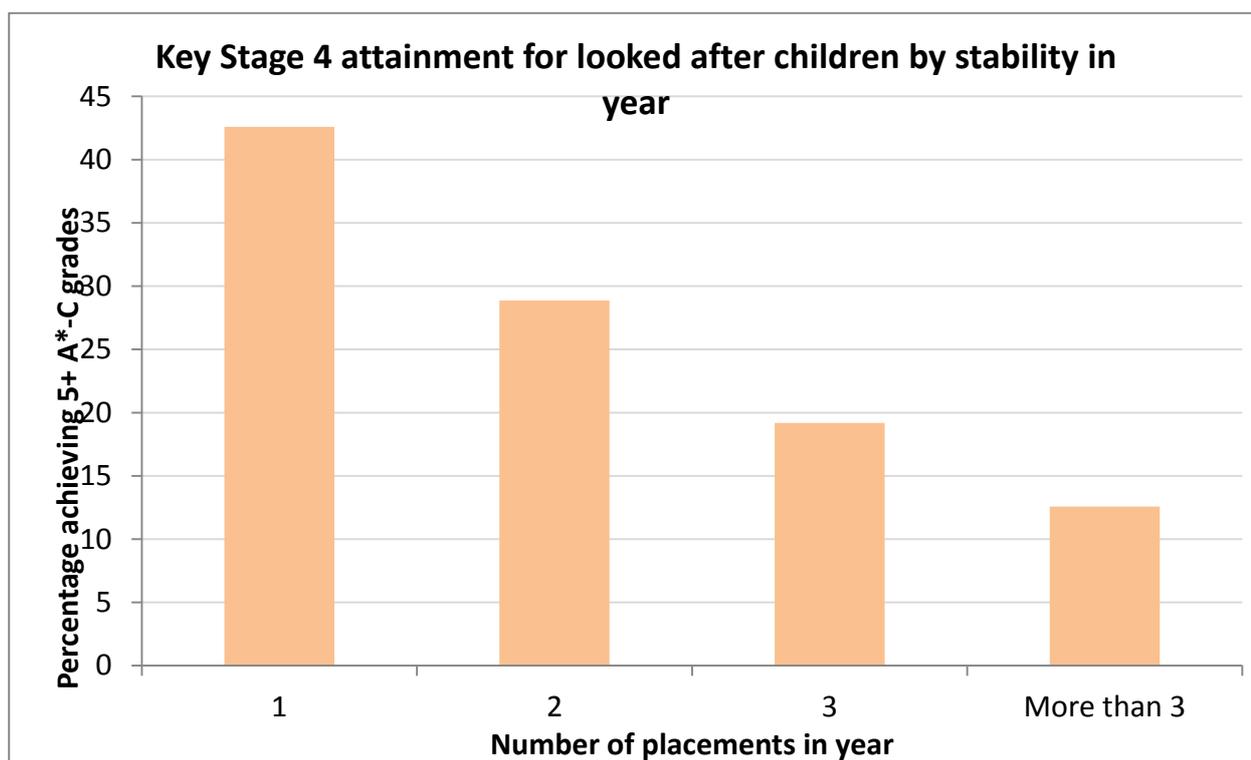
Figure 8: The educational attainment for looked after children at KS4 by placement stability in 2012

43% of children with just a single placement during 2011-12 achieved 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE compared to 13% of those who had more than three placements

Length of time looked after and educational attainment

Table 9 shows the length of time children had been looked after by the percentage achieving 5+ GCSEs at A* - C grades in 2012. The blue line shows those children achieving 5+ A*-C grades overall and the red line shows those children achieving 5+ A* - C grades including English and mathematics.
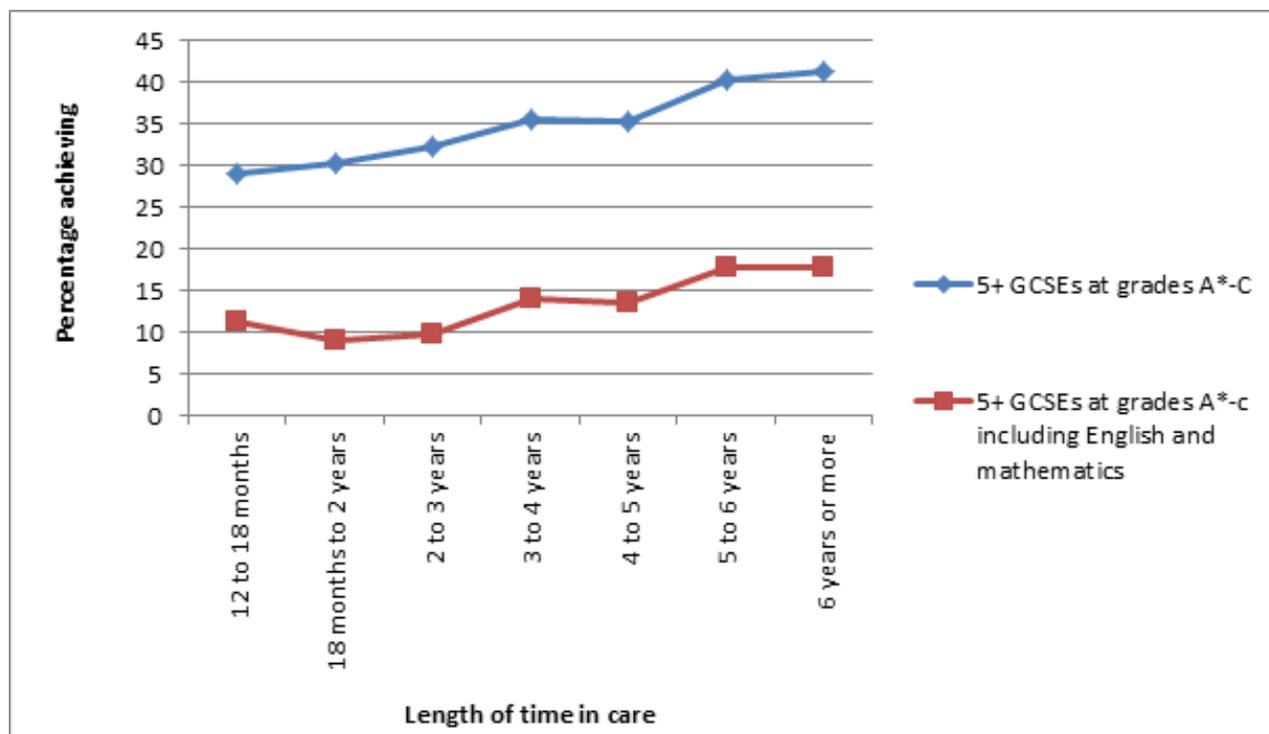
Figure 9: The length of time children had been looked after by the percentage achieving 5+ GCSEs at A* - C grades in 2012

29% of children who had been looked after between 12 and 18 months achieved 5+ A-C* compared to 41% who had been looked after for six years or more

Key messages

- Children who had been in their current period of care for longer were generally more likely to achieve at KS4 than those who had had shorter periods of care

Messages and questions for local authorities

There is a clear correlation between the number of placements and educational attainment. It does not however demonstrate a causal relationship. Local authorities have a duty to promote the educational attainment of the children they look after wherever they live so it is essential to consider a child's educational needs as an integral part of care and placement planning.

The following questions could be considered when analysing local data:

- What proportion of looked after children at KS4 had 1, 2, 3, 4-5, 6-9 or 10+ placements during the year? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- What percentage of looked after children achieved 5+ A* - C grades at GCSEs including English and Maths? How does this link to their placement stability during KS4? How does the data in your local authority compare to statistical neighbours, to other local authorities in your region and to the national picture?
- Does the pattern for educational attainment of your looked after children mirror the national picture for placement stability and educational attainment? How do you use this data to inform the decisions of social workers, foster carers, residential workers and the commissioning process?
- How do you support children who start to be looked after at the primary/secondary school transition point?
- How do we monitor placement changes and impact on educational stability? What do we do to proactively avoid disrupting education where it becomes necessary for a child to move placement at any point in their education and also a crucial transition points and at KS4?
- Are foster carers and residential workers trained to understand the education system and how the support they provide can make a difference to a child's educational attainment?
- Are foster carers and residential workers encouraged to engage with the child's school e.g. to attend parent's evenings?
- What more could social workers, commissioners, Virtual School Heads, fostering services and others do to improve and support placement stability?

Section Two - Return home from care

Children who return home from care are the largest single group of children who cease to be looked after in any one year. Research shows that careful assessment of needs, evidence of improvements in parenting capacity, slow and well managed return home and the provision of services to support children and their families after the return were associated with a positive experience of reunification which lasted.

However, research also shows that almost half (47%) of children who return home re-entered care and almost a third of the experiences are poor quality. In total two-thirds (64%) of children who returned home experienced at least one failed return and a third had oscillated in and out of care twice or more[4].These repeat re-entries to care impact on both child outcomes and local authority costs. Annex A includes a number of case studies which demonstrate the cost of supported return and the cost of re-entry to care.

Timely and effective decision-making and purposeful social work with children and their families to prepare and support the return, underpins long term stability and good outcomes for individual children.

The information in this section aims to help local authorities to gain a better understanding of the local and regional context and to consider the factors that will enable safe, successful and lasting reunification.

Definition of return home

A child is recorded as returning home from an episode of care if he or she ceases to be looked after by returning to live with parents or another person who has parental responsibility. This includes a child who returns to live with their adoptive parents but does not include a child who become the subject of an adoption order for the first time, nor a child who becomes the subject of a residence or special guardianship order.

Data published as part of the Statistical First Release

Data on numbers of children who return home to their family after ceasing to be looked after is published in the *Statistical First Release – Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers)* for each year ending 31 March.

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[4] Wade.J, Biehal. N, Farrelly. N, Sinclair. I (2011) *Caring for Abused and Neglected Children: Making the Right Decisions for Reunification or Long-Term Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Additional data on return home in this data pack

This section provides information about:

- the number of children who return home as a proportion of all looked after children who cease to be looked after
- the age, legal status and reason for first entering care of the children who return home
- the number of children who return home by local authority (as a proportion of all children who cease to be looked after)

- In the year ending 31 March 2012 returning home to their family was the most common reason why a child ceased to be looked after. 37% (10,160) children returned to the care of their family during the year
- 14,330 children who were accommodated under s20 ceased to be looked after in 2011-12. Of these, 51% (7,250) returned home
- The percentage returning home was highest at 45% for those who entered care due to parents' illness or disability and for families in acute stress and lowest at 15% for those who entered due to absent parenting
- The longer that a child had been looked after in their latest period of care, the less likely they were to return home to parents or relatives when this period ended

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Children returning home by age

The age of a child is an important factor when considering how to ensure successful return home from care. For very young children, stability and continuity of carers is important for development and forming positive and nurturing attachments. Additional services and support may be needed both before and after a return home to ensure that parents are able to provide safe and nurturing care. Teenagers will often make their own decision to return home to their family but again this is likely to need a high level of support from the local authority if the return is to be successful. Local authorities will need to be actively engaged with these young people and their families.

While looking at this data within the context of a single year may be interesting and helpful, it is also important to consider the patterns of re-entry to care over a period of several years. This may highlight areas for improvement in planning and supporting safe, successful and lasting return home.
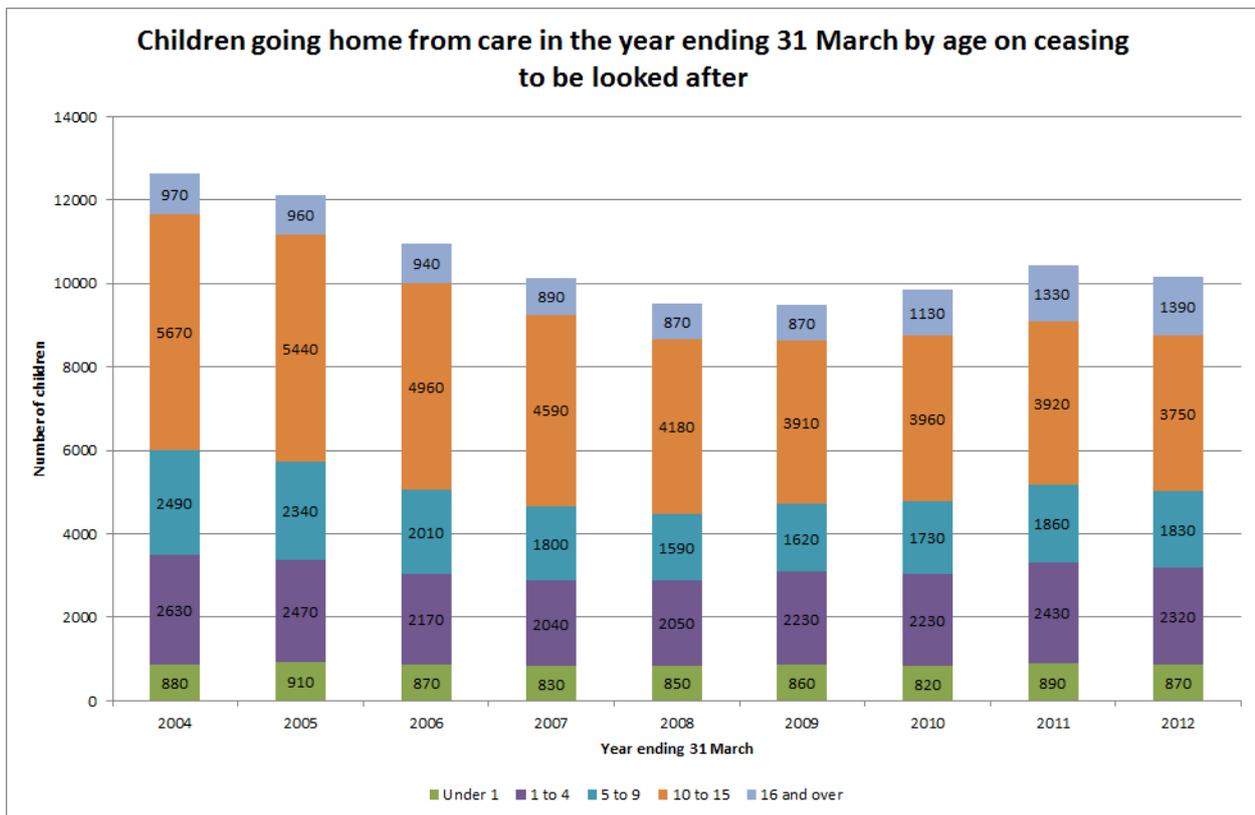
Figure 10: Children going home from care in the year ending 31 March by age on ceasing to be looked after

The percentage of looked after children who returned home from care dropped from 49 to 39% between 2004 and 2008 while age groups stayed nearly the same

Key messages:

- Between 2004 and 2008 the number of children returning home dropped by approximately 25% (from 12,640 in 2004 to 9,530 in 2008). Since 2009 the number returning home has remained more static between 9,500 and 10,500
- This drop in the number of children who returned home after ceasing to be looked after was not particularly represented in the overall number of children who ceased to be looked after. The total number of children who ceased to be looked after during these years stayed relatively stable at around 25,000.
- Unsurprisingly the largest group who return to their families are the 10 – 15yr olds who are more likely to be accommodated under s20 and who frequently make their own decisions about returning home outside the care planning process.

Children returning home by legal status

The legal status of a child can impact on the experience of children returning to their families. The statutory framework is clear that there should be a plan for all children

returning home that identifies the supports and services which will be needed by the child and family to ensure reunification is successful. This is already strong for those children who return home under a care order and maintain their looked after status. However, children who are accommodated under s20 may be more vulnerable as these returns are sometimes unplanned – the decision taken by a parent at short notice, a return home following a placement breakdown or the child making the decision to return to their family.

Appropriate assessment, planning and interventions with regular review built in for all children who return home, are essential to ensure that they can be safely reunified with their family with a realistic chance of success. Local authorities have a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. While pre-return support may be costly in the short term for local authorities the long term benefits in terms of children remaining at home in safe, stable placements could result in cost savings.

Children who ceased to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2012 by reason for leaving care and final legal status
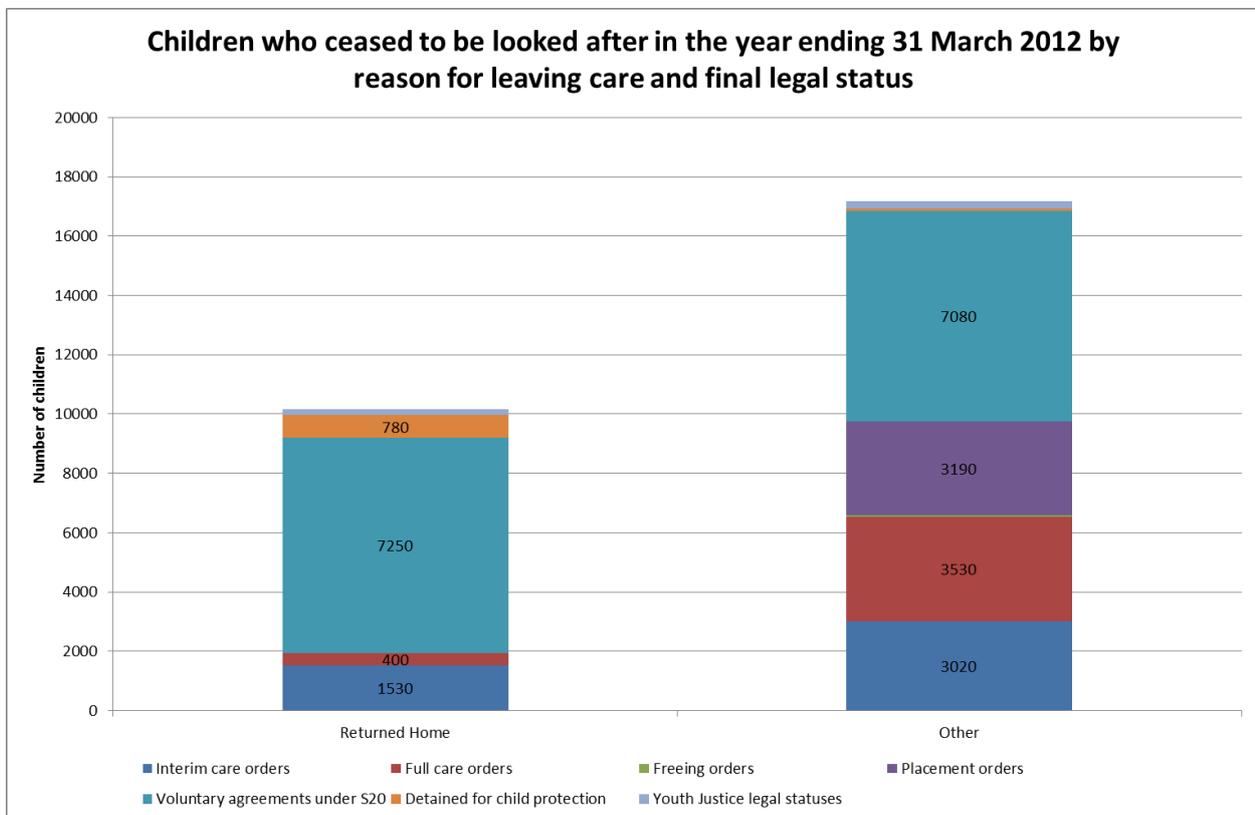
Figure 11: Children who ceased to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2012 by reason for leaving care and final legal status

14,330 children who were accommodated under s20 ceased to be looked after in 2011-12. Of these, 51% (7,250) returned home

Key messages

- Very low number of children on care orders returned home compared to other destinations
- 4,550 children who were on interim care orders ceased to be looked after during the year. 1,530 of these (34%) returned home

Children returning home by duration of latest period of care

When a child enters care local authorities must consider whether reunification with the family is possible. For some children this is clearly not in their best interests but for many others returning home to their family is the appropriate route to permanence. However, once a child has been looked after for more than a year, the likelihood of them returning home decreases substantially.
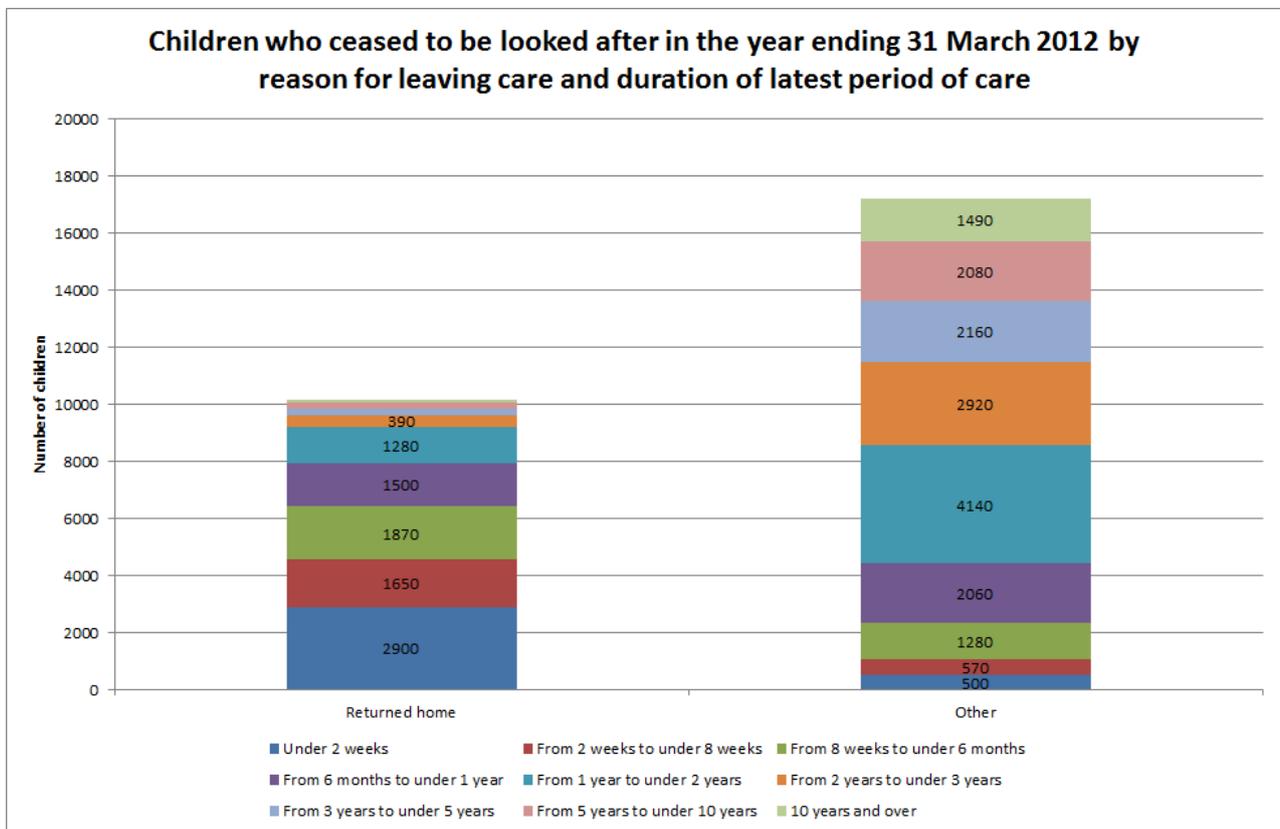

Figure 12: Children who ceased to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2012 by reason for leaving care and duration of latest period of care

The longer that a child had been looked after in their latest period of care, the less likely they were to return home to parents or relatives when this period ended

Key messages

- Returning home was most likely in the first year of being looked after
- 64% of children who had been looked after for less than one year returned home compared to just 15% for those who had been looked after for more than one year

Children returning home by local authority

The numbers of children who return home varies by local authority. This may be the result of several factors. The size of the care population, the organisational approach to supporting reunification and the local services available to support children and their families may all impact on decisions to return children home and the successful outcome of those decisions.
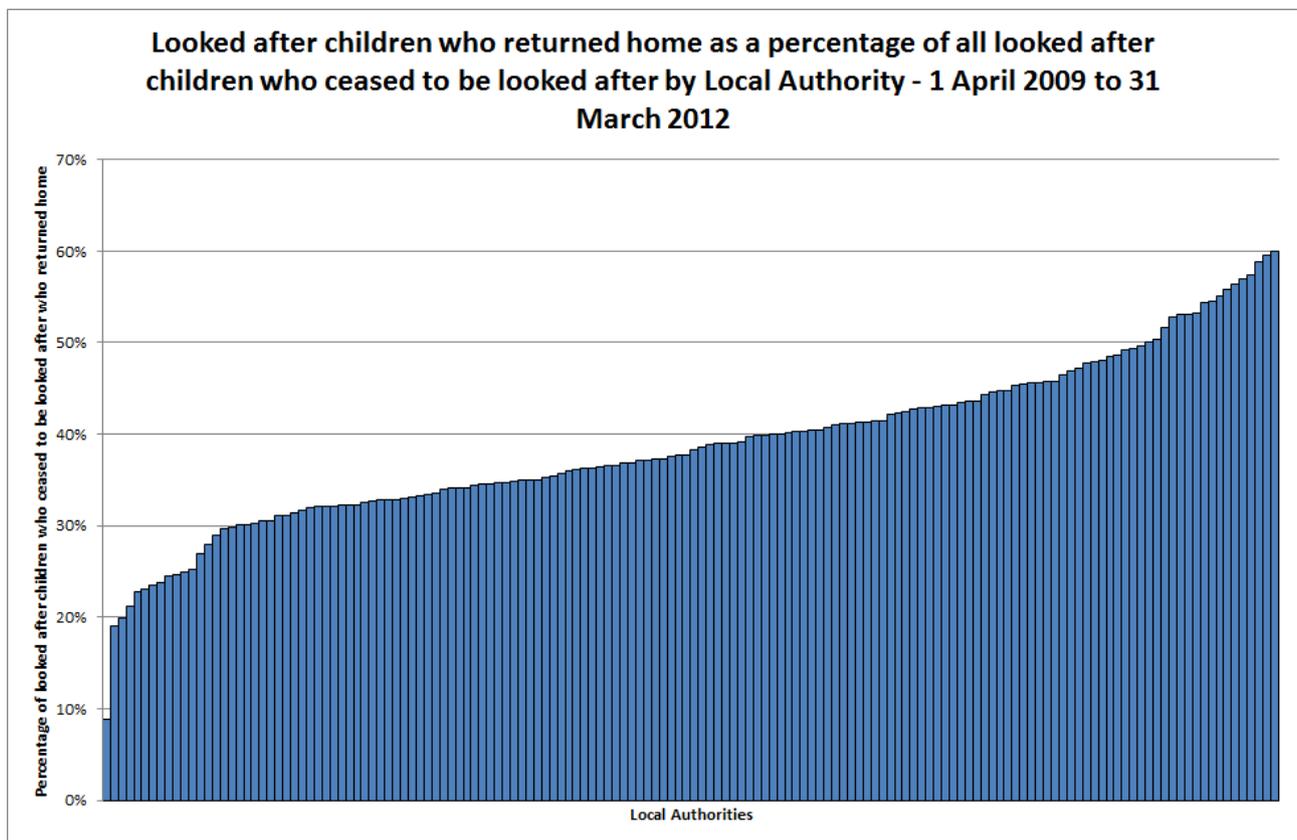
Figure 13: Looked after children who returned home as a percentage of all looked after children who ceased to be looked after by local authority between 1 April 2009 and the 31 March 2012.

The percentage of children returning home between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2012 as a proportion of all children who ceased to be looked after ranged from 9% to 60% between local authorities

A detailed table which shows the number of children who returned home by local authority 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2012 is provided at Annex E.

While the information in this section and at Annex E provides an insight into the local variations when returning children home, it does not show whether those returning large or very small numbers of children home led to successful and safe reunification in the long term. It simply illustrates the broad variation in approach.

Messages and questions for local authorities

Local authorities need a clear organisational approach and framework for returning children home. Thorough assessment, purposeful preparation, clear expectations about parental change and the provision of intensive interventions and good quality support services all contribute to successful return home.

The following questions could be considered when analysing local data:

General

- What proportion of your looked after population returned home to their families after ceasing to be looked after last year? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- What are the assessment and decision making processes for return home from care?
- What services are available to support children returning home to their families? How do services link across children, adult and specialist services – for example can access to parenting programmes or drug and alcohol treatment be secured as part of a return home plan?
- How has our service provision for these children and their families changed over the last five years? What informed the change?
- What action are you currently taking to improve return home practice?

Age

- Do you understand the age profile of the children who return home each year? Has the age profile changed over the previous five years?
- Do you have services and/or interventions that support children in specific age groups who are returning home?
- Does your local data about the age and needs profile suggest the need to consider exploring whether there are sufficient, evidence informed age specific services/interventions to improve returns home decision making and success?

Local area

- What local factors might impact on return home practice?

- How do you compare to your statistical neighbours in terms of size of care population, age profile of looked after children and numbers of children returned home? If there are significant differences, do you understand why?
- How is the goal of returning children home to their families successfully reflected in local policy and practice? How is this monitored?

Children returning home in 2006-7 who had re-entered care by 2012

The previous section demonstrates that for many children returning home to their family was the most common reason why children ceased to be looked after. However research shows that between a third and half of children who return home re-enter care and almost a third of the experiences are poor quality. In total, two-thirds (64%) of children who returned home experienced at least one failed return and a third had oscillated in and out of care twice or more[5].Many returns home were characterised by a lack of support.

Local authorities should ensure that their framework for returning children home to their families is based on robust assessment, decision making, planning, intervention and review processes.

The following section provides information about the number of children who returned home in the year 2006-7 who had returned to care by 2012. Some of the key messages about these statistics highlight the importance of addressing the parent's capacity to provide good quality care and providing support during the period of transition to ensure that the arrangements are meeting the child's needs. The support plan should be regularly reviewed.

Children who went home in 2006-07 - the percentage who had returned to care by 31 March 2012
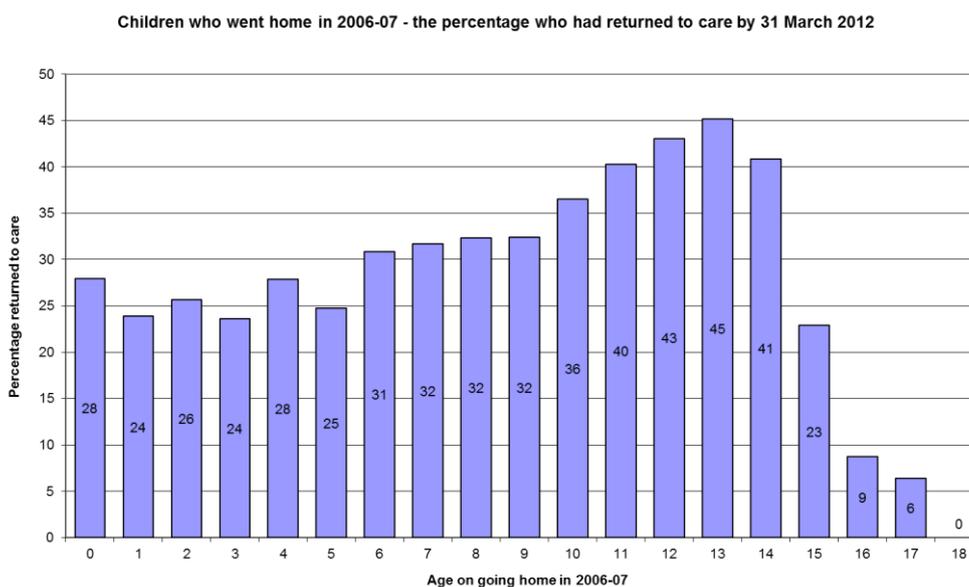

Figure 14: Children who went home in 2006-07 – the percentage who had returned to care by 31 March 2012Key messages

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[5] Farmer. E (2006) *The Reunification of Looked After Children and their Parents: patterns, interventions and outcomes,* Jessica Kingsley Press

- 30% (3,050) of the 10,270 children who went home in 2006-7 had returned to care in the five years to 31 March 2012
- The largest group to re-enter care following a return home were the 12 – 14 year olds. 45% (350) of the 780 13yr olds returned to care, followed by 43% of 12yr olds and 41% of 14yr olds
- For those children who returned to care (3,050) 27% were still looked after at 31 March 2012 and 15% had left care at 18 or over
- 28% (approximately 500) of the children who had returned to care in the five years to 31 March 2012 had returned home again
- Children who were on care orders prior to going home were far less likely to return to care (6% of all children who returned home who were looked after under a full care order in 2006-7 had returned by 31 March 2012). 34% of children who were voluntarily accommodated prior to returning home had returned to care by 31 March 2012
- Children were most likely to return to care if they had been looked after for less than six months. 39% of those looked after for between two and eight weeks had returned by 31 March 2012 and 38% who had been looked after between eight weeks and six months had returned by 31 March 2012.
- Of the group of children who returned to care by 2012, 8% had been at home for less than two weeks while 17% had been at home for at least two years

Messages and questions for local authorities

Timely decision-making when considering a return home, purposeful social work with these children and their families help them address underlying difficulties, effective assessment to review whether sufficient change has taken place and on-going support following return home are factors that contribute to better outcomes for these children and long term stability following reunification.

More information is required about whether improvements in these areas would result in more successful returns home and what the barriers are for local authorities and their partners in providing high quality return home services.

The following questions could be considered when analysing local data:

- Is there an organisational framework for return home work?
- How many of the children who returned home over the last five years re-entered care?
- Are there children in particular age groups who re-enter care?
- Was the reason for re-entering care the same reason for the first episode of care?

- How many children over the last five years have returned home and re-entered care on more than one occasion? Do the reasons for re-entering care remain consistent? How are those children who return home monitored?

Annex A - Return Home from Care: cost calculations

In light of the research findings about the lack of support leading to breakdown of reunification in some circumstances, the Department has worked with Loughborough University to draw up a number of scenarios reflecting the costs of returning children home based on a range of ages, circumstances and placement types.

The aim of this work is to provide a series of estimated unit cost trajectories for children returning home from care. These cases compare supported return home which is successful to the cost of unsupported return home that often leads to breakdown and re-entry to care, sometimes on more than one occasion. The case studies can also be used to look at the cost of additional services that are available to the whole family in supporting children to remain at home. It is however recognised that some returns home will not be successful even when support is provided.

These estimated unit costs include the processes undertaken to support looked after children, other children in need (under s17 of the Children Act 1989) and those supported under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

Loughborough cost calculator

The Cost Calculator for Children's Services (CCfCS) is a purpose-designed model which uses a piece of software that aims to assist local authorities and other agencies to calculate the costs of social care processes and placements for looked after children. It enables local authorities to cost placements and the activity carried out to support their looked after children in those placements. These costs can be aggregated to produce annual costs, costs for specific types of placements, costs for individual children and for groups of children with different kinds of needs, or according to age or gender. It facilitates comparisons between the relative value of different types of care, making it easier to estimate the potential benefits of introducing a range of alternative packages. The cost calculator has now been extended to include wider costs of children in need services as well as some health and youth justice services.

In developing the costs calculator Loughborough costed the following eight processes:

- Process 1: Deciding child needs to be looked after and finding a first placement
- Process 2: Care Planning
- Process 3: Maintaining the placement
- Process 4: Leaving care/accommodation
- Process 5: Finding a subsequent placement
- Process 6: Review
- Process 7: Legal interventions
- Process 8: Transition to leaving care services

The following link provides up to date information on accessing the cost calculator - http://tinyurl.com/kta5olb

The case studies

Seven hypothetical case studies have been developed using information gathered from the wider work that DfE has carried out with external organisations including local authorities to explore children's return home from care. The case studies were developed to illustrate possible outcomes for children returning home, based on existing research findings.

For each case study there is a brief description of the child, their circumstances, placement(s) and services/support provided. This is followed by a table of the unit cost estimations. The time period covered is January 2012 to January 2013.

Key Messages from the case studies

- Children often require higher levels of service due to the emotional impact of experiences in the birth family which leads to higher cost placements when they re-enter care.
- Appropriate services and support in place for a child and parents/family from the beginning of the care episode, throughout care placement and after the return home can significantly reduce the cost to the local authority
- Without the supports in place a child is likely to re-enter care where issues that caused the care episode remain unaddressed
- Comparison of the two scenarios in case study 2 clearly shows the financial savings of providing whole family support for a child returning from care. The child in first scenario not only faced the disruption of the repeated moves from birth parent to grandparents over a short period of time but the cost to the local authority is ultimately increased. Although additional cost is involved in providing services to the family, this will become a saving to the local authority in the long term as the child remains at home rather than returning to care
- Comparison between case studies 5 and 8 shows that the level of support after a placement is critical to the outcome of the return. Where the child received little or no support the breakdown happened quickly. Where there was support even at a low level the placement remained stable. The added cost attached to the case study 5 support package would be less than the foster care placement or residential unit placement cost for the child returning

Unit Cost Estimations

The unit cost estimations used are based on estimates for 2012-13 financial year. Where costs have been taken from research completed in previous years the unit costs have been inflated to 2012-13 using inflation indices.

The unit costs of support foster care have been estimated by the Fostering Network and have been included in these case studies with permission from the Fostering Network (these unit costs are currently unpublished)

How should Local Authorities use these case studies?

- To understand and map local trends in children returning home from care
- To review their local data in the context of national data to support improvements to local service delivery and practice
- To support commissioning of services for children returning home

National unit costs on services for children and their families can be found at this link: http://tinyurl.com/kgehumy

To help with the comparison of service and delivery costs local authorities may wish to use their own local data if known for a more accurate comparison.

It will be important to demonstrate a clear rationale for the approach taken when calculating costs.

In order to aid these comparisons local authorities may wish to consider the following areas in their data:

- review of the existing sources of information about children who return home
- profile of the costs of existing services and description of target population
- views of the potential target population of children and their parents
- views of relevant practitioners and service providers
- analysis and interpretation of the results with recommendations for action

Social care costs of case management processes for a looked after child[6]

LAC 1	Deciding child needs to be looked after and finding first placement
LAC 2	Care planning
LAC 3	Maintaining the placement (per month)
LAC 4	Exit from care/accommodation
LAC 5	Finding a subsequent placement
LAC 6	Review

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[6] Ward, H. Holmes, L. and Soper, J. (2008) *Costs and Consequences of Placing Children in Care,* London: Jessica Kingsley

Social care processes for all Children in Need (CiN)[7]

CiN 1	Initial contact and referral;
CiN 2	Initial Assessment
CiN 3	On-going support
CiN 4	Close case
CiN 5	Core Assessment
CiN 6	Planning and review
CiN 7	Section 47 enquiry
CiN 8	Public Law Outline

Return home from care – Resources

Curtis, L. (ed.) (2012) *Unit costs of health and social care 2012*, Kent: Personal Social Services Research Unit

Holmes, L. and McDermid, S. (2012) *Understanding costs and outcomes in child welfare services*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Holmes, L., McDermid, S., Padley, M. and Soper, J. (2012) *Exploration of the Costs and Outcomes of the Common Assessment Framework*, London: Department for Education

Ward, H., Holmes, L. and Soper, J. (2008) *Costs and Consequences of Placing Children in Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

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[7] Ward, H., Holmes, L., Dyson, P.,McDermid, S. and Scott, J. (2008) *The Costs and Outcomes of Child Welfare Interventions: Mapping Children in Need Services*. Report to the Department for Children, Schools and Families. Loughborough: CCFR.

Case study 1 (Child B)

Background information

- Child B first became looked after as a baby (13 months) and was placed with local authority foster carers when an interim care order was obtained
- In February 2011 Child B returned home and a high level of Child in Need support was provided to the family throughout the time period
- For the duration of the twelve months, the parent was provided with drug and alcohol treatment services

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
CiN 3 - on-going[8]	12 months	198	2,376
CiN 6	3 times	228	684

Total social care case management unit costs   £3,060

Other support or services

Support or service	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
Drug/alcohol[9]	once a fortnight	120	3,120

Total cost of other support or services   £3,120

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[8] Unit costs of providing CiN support have been taken from Holmes and McDermid (2012)

[9] Unit cost taken from the PSSRU unit cost book (Curtis, 2012), based on one session per week for 26 weeks

Case study 2 (Child C)

For Case Study 2 we have estimated two scenarios to compare different support pathways and the outcome in terms of costs and the child's outcome.

Scenario One - informal support only followed by a return to care

Background information

- Child C first became looked after under Section 20 arrangements at the age of five
- Child C was placed with grandparents out of the area of the local authority under the arrangements for temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer
- The placement lasted for three months and on return home formal support was not provided; however grandmother provided continuing informal support to the family
- In October 2012 Child C became looked after again and returned to the care of her grandmother

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)[10]

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
LAC 1	Twice	1,266	2,532
LAC 2	Twice	239	478
LAC 3	6 months in total	2,903	17,418
LAC 4	Once	412	412
LAC 6	Twice	614	1,228

Total social care case management unit costs   £22,068

Scenario Two - formal package of care on return home

Background information

- Child C first became looked after under Section 20 arrangements at the age of five. Child C was placed with grandparents out of the area of the local authority under temporary approval of a connected person

[10] Unit costs for LAC have been taken from Ward, Holmes and Soper (2008)

- KEEP training provided to the grandmother
- The placement lasted for three months and on return home, following a Family Group Conference, a formal package of support was provided, this included drug and alcohol services for the parents
- This package of support was provided for six months under CiN provision and then closed

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)[11]

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
LAC 1	Once	1,266	1,266
LAC 2	Once	239	239
LAC 3	3 months in total	2,903	8,709
LAC 4	Once	412	412
LAC 6	Once	614	614
CiN 3 - on-going	6 months in total	193	1,158
FGC	Once	400	400
CiN 6	Once	228	228
CiN 4	Once	98	98

Total social care case management unit costs   £13,124

Other support or services

Support or service	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
Drug and alcohol	On-going 6 months	120[12]	3,120
KEEP	On-going 6 months	2,000[13]	2,000

[11] Unit costs for LAC have been taken from Ward, Holmes and Soper (2008). Unit cost for CiN has been taken from Holmes and McDermid (2012). The unit cost of the Family Group Conference was provided by DfE.

[12] Unit cost taken from the PSSRU unit cost book (Curtis, 2012), based on one session per week for 26 weeks.

[13] Unit cost of KEEP per carer provided based on figures provided by the National Implementation team.

Case study 3 (Child D)

Background information

- Child D became looked after at the age of six and, due to identified emotional and behavioural difficulties, was placed in a specialist fostering placement provided by an independent provider
- This placement lasted for one year until February 2012. On return home Child in Need services were provided for six months, these services then continued at a lower level of support, but still as an open Child in Need case until April 2013.
- Child D did not return to care

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)[14]

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
LAC 3	1 month	6,116	6,116
LAC 4	Once	412	412
CiN 3 - on-going	11 months in total	514 and 193[15]	4,049
CiN 5	Once	603	603
CiN 6	Once	228	228

Total social care case management unit costs   £11,408

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[14] Unit costs for LAC taken from Ward, Holmes and Soper (2008). CiN unit costs taken from Holmes and McDermid (2012)

[15] Unit cost of £514 is for the higher level of support for six months, this then reduces to £193 per month for the remaining five months

Case study 4 (Child E)

Background information

- Child E was accommodated aged nine under Section 20 arrangements and was placed in an independently provided foster placement out of the area of the local authority
- The placement lasted between April and November 2012. Prior to the time period included in costings, Child E had experienced three previous care placements
- On return home a package of support was provided, including on-going support foster care (two and a half days a week), Functional Family Therapy (FFT) programme

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)[16]

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
LAC 1	Once	1992	1992
LAC 2	Twice	238	476
LAC 3	8 months	6,014	48,112
LAC 4	Once	412	412
LAC 6	Twice	614	1,228
Support foster carer - on-going	1 month	1,219[17]	1,219
Support foster carer - referral	Once	392	392

Total social care case management unit costs   £53,831

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[16] Unit costs for LAC taken from Ward, Holmes and Soper (2008)

[17] This includes the ongoing support to the support foster carers and the fees and allowances paid to the carers, based on 2 1/2 days per week

Other support or services

Support or service	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
FFT[18]	81.5 hours	4,865	4,865
Parenting programme	On-going 1 month	1,200[19]	1,200

Total cost of other support or services   £6,065

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[18] FFT costs provided by an individual local authority. These may not be representative of FFT nationally due to differences in salaries and pay-grades of the personnel within the FFT team.

[19] Unit cost taken from Curtis (2012) Unit costs of health and social care, schema 12.7 - multi-disciplinary CAMHS face to face contact

Case study 5 (Child F)

Background information

- Child F was placed in a specialist therapeutic foster care community placement outside the area of the placing authority; this placement was from September 2011 until October 2012
- Child F was aged 11 at the start of the specialist placement and had emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Prior to this placement Child F had experienced two other care placements and was accommodated under Section 20 arrangements.
- On return home Child F was referred to receive support foster care. A support foster care family was identified and respite care was provided by the carers for one day a week
- The case also remained open as a CiN/support f/c case and this support was on-going until March 2013 when the case was closed

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
LAC 2	Twice	238	476
LAC 3	10 months	11,855	118,550
LAC 4	Once	412	412
LAC 6	Twice	614	1,228
Support foster carer - on-going	2 months	688	1,376
Support foster carer - referral	Once	392	392

Total social care case management unit costs   £122,434

Case study 6 (Child G)

Background information

- Child G was placed in a local authority children's home in August 2011, aged 14. Child G had experienced one previous placement and was looked after continuously under Section 20 arrangements
- Child G returned home in May 2012; this return lasted for 4 months and then Child G returned to care and was once again placed in a local authority residential unit
- During the four month period that Child G was at home, low level CiN services were provided (such as social worker visits) to support leaving care transition

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)[20]

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
LAC 1	Once	1,200	1,200
LAC 2	Once	238	238
LAC 3	8 months in total	11,220	89,760
LAC 4	Once	412	412
LAC 6	Once	614	614
CiN 3 – on-going	4 months	193	772
CiN 5	Once	603	603

Total social care case management unit costs   £93,599

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[20] LAC unit costs taken from Ward, Holmes and Soper (2008). CiN unit costs taken from Holmes and McDermid (2012)

Case study 7 (Child H)

Background information

- Child H was placed with foster carers through an Independent Fostering Provider in June 2010, aged 16, following a Care Order being obtained
- Child H had emotional and behavioural difficulties and remained in the placement until August 2011
- On return home Child H continued to be supported by the IFP and there was a good working relationship between the foster carers and birth family
- The support lasted until the end of March 2012.The timeline below shows the CiN support provided during the first three months of 2012

Unit cost estimations

Social care processes (case management)

Process	Frequency/duration	Unit cost (£)	Subtotal (£)
CiN 3 – on-going	3 months	1,072	3,216
CiN 4	Once	98	98

Total social care case management unit costs   £3,314

Annex B - Summary of local authority questions

Placement stability – Age, reason for entering care and local authority

General

- What proportion of our looked after population experienced more than 10 placements last year? How does this compare to the previous five years? What do we know about the needs profile of these children and their families?
- What proportion of our looked after population experienced three or more placements last year? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- What are our services for looked after children and their families?
- How has our service provision changed over the last five years? What informed the change?
- What action are we currently taking to improve placement stability?

Age

- Do we understand the age profile of our looked after population in terms of the average age of children entering care and the split across age groups (e.g. under 2yrs, 3 – 6yr olds, 7 -12yr olds and 13yrs-15yrs and 16yrs+) within the current care population? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- Do we have services and/or interventions that target specific age groups – e.g. specialist foster care provision for very young children such as the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care – Prevention Programme for 3 – 6 year olds? If yes, what informed the decision to commission these services/interventions?
- Does our local data about the age and needs profile suggest that we consider exploring the need for age specific services/interventions to improve placement stability?
- Are there children in particular age groups who are difficult to place? Is this due to complex needs and no appropriate local placements/services? What are our current arrangements for out of area placements and spot purchasing?

Reason for entering care

- Do we understand the profile of our looked after population in terms of the reason for entering care? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- Do we have usual services and/or interventions that target children with particular experiences and needs – e.g. specialist services that address parental difficulties which impact on their capacity to parent such as Multisystemic Therapy? If yes, what informed the decision to commission these services/interventions?

Local area

- What local factors might impact on placement stability? These could include areas of deprivation or local housing stock which may impact on foster carer recruitment?
- How do we compare to our statistical neighbours in terms of size of care population, age profile of looked after children and reasons for entering care?
- How are local looked after children's services organised and made available across the local authority area? How might this impact on placement stability?
- How is the goal of achieving placement stability reflected in local policy and practice? How is this monitored?

Placement stability – length of care and time in placement

- What proportion of your looked after population has been in care for more than five years?
- How many of these children have been in the same placement for this time?
- What proportion of those children who have been in care over five years are looked after under a care order? Does this impact on placement stability?
- In terms of placement type (Relative and friend foster care, other foster care and residential care) – what are the most stable placements over time in your area?
- Do we collect and track the number of placements children have during their care journey or just in a particular care episode? Are there trends for particular age groups or placement types?
- Do you record why placements end? Do you track the reasons over time for individual children, groups and the whole looked after population?
- What are the most frequent reasons for placements ending and does this differ based on placement type (e.g. for those children accommodated under s20 who have been placed with relative and friend carers) or for different age groups.

Placement stability and educational attainment

- What proportion of looked after children at KS4 had 1, 2, 3, 4-5, 6-9 or 10+ placements during the year? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- What percentage of looked after children achieved 5+ A* - C grades at GCSEs including English and Maths? How does this link to their placement stability during KS4? How does the data in your local authority compare to statistical neighbours, to other local authorities in your region and to the national picture?
- Does the pattern for educational attainment of your looked after children mirror the national picture for placement stability and educational attainment? How do you use this data to inform the decisions of social workers, foster carers, residential workers and the commissioning process?

- How do you support children who start to be looked after at the primary/secondary school transition point?
- How do we monitor placement changes and impact on educational stability? What do we do to proactively avoid disrupting education where it becomes necessary for a child to move placement at any point in their education and also a crucial transition points and at KS4?
- What more could social workers, commissioners, Virtual School Heads, fostering services and others do to improve and support placement stability?
- Are foster carers and residential workers trained to understand the education system and how the support they provide can make a difference to a child's educational attainment?
- Are foster carers and residential workers encouraged to engage with the child's school e.g. attend parent's evenings?

Return home from care

General

- What proportion of your looked after population returned home to their families after ceasing to be looked after last year? How does this compare to the previous five years?
- What are the assessment and decision making processes for return home from care?
- What services are available to support children returning home to their families? How do services link across children, adult and specialist services – for example can access to parenting programmes or drug and alcohol treatment be secured as part of a return home plan?
- How has our service provision for these children and their families changed over the last five years? What informed the change?
- What action are you currently taking to improve return home practice?

Age

- Do you understand the age profile of the children who return home each year? Has the age profile changed over the previous five years?
- Do you have services and/or interventions that support children in specific age groups who are returning home?
- Does your local data about the age and needs profile suggest the need to consider exploring whether there are sufficient, evidence informed age specific services/interventions to improve returns home decision making and success?

Local area

- What local factors might impact on return home practice?
- How do you compare to your statistical neighbours in terms of size of care population, age profile of looked after children and numbers of children returned home? If there are significant differences, do you understand why?
- How are local looked after children's services organised and made available across the local authority area? How might this impact on return home work?
- How is the goal of returning children home to their families successfully reflected in local policy and practice? How is this monitored?

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