

	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 October 2018
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index for Children in Care	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision: (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service Looked After Children and Permanency Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYPS Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman, Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Email: nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about The Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index for Children in Care. This report also provides a summary of activities undertaken to achieve stability for looked after children in Brent.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that looked after children in Brent receive the appropriate stability of care arrangements, wherever they might be placed.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1** The Stability Index (SI) was launched in 2017 by the Children's Commissioner¹ as an annual measure of the stability of the lives of children in care. The SI aims to improve stability for looked after children by highlighting the issue of stability and providing data that allows stability to be monitored over time.

The 2018 SI primarily used the data from 2015/16 and 2016/17. It provides an analysis that is based on several data measures such as change of placements, change of schools and change of social workers for looked after children.

- 3.2** The 2018 SI found out that whilst many children in care had stable arrangements, too many experience instability in different aspects of their lives. Some children were reported to experience repeat changes of placements, of school or with social workers. The SI has established that some children are more likely to experience instability such as those with additional behavioural and emotional needs, who have recently entered care, whose legal status indicates higher risk or who are in pupil referral units. Some of the general SI² findings are below:

- Only 1 in 4 children in care experienced no placement move, no school move and no social worker change in 2016/17.
- Over 3,000 children (6% of those in care in both 2015/16 and 2016/17) experienced four or more placement moves over two years.
- Nearly 2,400 children experienced a placement move, a school move and a change in social worker all in 2016/17.
- Children who experience instability are at risk of having it compounded by more instability in future.
- Social worker changes remain significantly more common than placement or school changes. Around 1 in 4 children in care experienced two or more social worker changes in 2016/17.

4. Stability Index for Brent

- 4.1** The SI for Brent focused on data across three main domains: placement changes, school changes and changes in social workers.

¹ The role of the Children's Commissioner was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. The Commissioner's remit includes understanding what children think about things that affect them and encouraging decision makers to take their best interests into account. The current Children's Commissioner is Anne Longfield OBE. The Children and Families Act 2014 further strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner.

² For details of the findings see <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/stability-index-initial-findings-and-technical-report/>.

4.2 Placement Changes

4.2.1 The 2018 SI found out that children in care in Brent have experienced more placement changes compared to the national average. It was reported that 14% of children had two or more placements in Brent compared to 10% nationally.

- 14% had 2 or more placement changes in 2016/17; (10% nationally)
- 5% had 2 or more placement changes in both 2015/16 and 2016/17; (3% nationally)
- 30% had 2 or more placement changes over two years (2015/16 - 2016/17); (22% nationally)
- 44% had 2 or more placement changes over three years (2014/15 - 2016/17); (30% nationally)

4.2.2 Brent's Context and actions taken to improve stability for LAC

4.2.3 Looked after children achieve better outcomes when they are in stable placements. Placement stability figures in Brent are closely linked with a number of factors that have an adverse effect on life journey of children in care: traumatic childhood experience prior to coming to care; age of children at the point of entry to care, lack of placement sufficiency for young people with multiple vulnerabilities in adolescence including child sexual exploitation, gang affiliation, children exploited by drug dealers across the country known as county lines.

4.2.5 Late entry to the care system is one of the challenges faced by the Local Authority in reducing the number of placement changes for young people. In 2017/18 over 35% of young people who became looked after were over the age of 16. This figure was 63.5% for children and young people who were above the age of 13. As at 30th September 2018, approximately 41% of the care population in Brent is over 16 years old. In 2017/18, this figure was 35% in statistical neighbour authorities and 32% as the national average.

4.2.6 Coming into care at a late stage in their adolescence, these young people mostly present with high level of complex and additional needs. Such characteristics can manifest themselves in highly challenging and risk taking behaviours that foster carers and many residential homes are not equipped to manage. It takes time for young people to settle into their placements and start having positive relationships with their care givers.

4.2.7 In Brent, a team of clinicians, the Brent Emotional Well-being Team and a social pedagogue, offer consultation to foster carers and social workers in order to assist them in helping young people with complex behavioural and emotional difficulties. Currently foster carers and social workers receive around 20 consultations per month.

4.2.8 Late entry is only one of the reasons for placement instability but it is an important factor affecting placement options and stability for children. The

number of appropriately equipped placements (including fostering or residential settings) is scarce. This is a challenge nationally and locally in London. Brent's Sufficiency Strategy identifies this national problem and includes measures to address this for Brent's looked after children.

- 4.2.9 Dealing with the issue of placement stability was already contained within a priority list of areas for further service improvement. A number of activities are in place to ensure that children change placements in a planned way when possible. All emergency placement moves are scrutinised by senior managers to ensure that it is in children's best interest to move.
- 4.2.10 A robust weekly Children's Placement Panel (CPP), chaired by a senior manager has an oversight on all placement changes. CPP tracks and monitors placements and ensures that children do not experience unnecessary disruptions and that any new placements meet health and education needs. Where a placement is at risk, placement stability meetings are held with key professionals. Individual placements are monitored by social workers and by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) as part of LAC Review.
- 4.2.11 Any potential placement move for children is carefully considered via a rigorous procedure. All placement change requests, overseen by Head of Service LAC and Permanency, ensure a placement change is in the child or young person's best interests. Children and young people, their parents and carer, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Brent Virtual School for LAC and other professionals are consulted prior to placement moves.
- 4.2.12 Brent's ambition in achieving stability was recognised by the 2018 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services. The 'outstanding' judgement for children in care and care leavers was based on Brent's focus on achieving longer term stability for looked after children: *"children's outcomes significantly improve when they become children in care. Practitioners and managers are highly effective at supporting the long-term stability for children, young people and care leavers during childhood and beyond."*

5 School Changes

- 5.1 The 2018 SI has found out that children in care in Brent experience fewer changes of schools compared to their peers nationally:
- 8% had a mid-year school move in 2016/17; (10% nationally)
 - 4% had at least one school move in both 2015/16 and 2016/17; (4% nationally)
- 5.2 Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children works hard to ensure that no looked after child is permanently excluded at statutory school age. BVS closely works with educational settings to ensure that children and young people receive adequate and appropriate level of support in their education as per their Personal Education Plans (PEP). Children, their care givers, social workers and teachers contribute to the PEP which is a document that sets goals for each individual child in relation to their education.

- 5.3 This issue was known to the Local Authority prior to the publication of the 2018 SI. In 2017, Brent commissioned a piece of work with Coram Voice in partnership with the University of Bristol, called 'Bright Spots'. The aim was to better understand the wishes and feelings of looked after children and took the form of an online survey with approximately 1/3 of eligible children taking part. The majority of children and young people stated that they were supported in their education and learning. 77% of them stated that their lives were improving since coming to care. The Survey was repeated again in 2018 and a similar number of children responded. 82% of the respondents felt that their lives were improving since coming to care.

6 Change in Social Worker

- 6.1 The 2018 SI has found that children in care in Brent experience more changes in their social workers compared to national data:
- 36% experienced 2 or more social worker changes in 2016/17; (26% nationally)
 - 11% experienced 2 or more social worker changes in 2016/17; (6% nationally)
- 6.2 Recruitment and retention of permanent social workers have been a corporate priority for Brent. Senior leaders in CYP have put in place a Workforce Development Strategy in order to increase the stability of social workers for all children including those who are in care. Whilst there has been a positive improvement in the number of permanent social workers, some children still experience too many changes in social workers. At present 75% of social workers in Looked After Children and Permanency Service (LACP) are permanent.
- 6.3 A realignment of CYP social work activity took place in January 2018 which has created new LAC Teams with the view to minimise transfer points for children and young people. In the former structure, children's cases were being transferred to LACP, were allocated to social workers depending on their ages and were then transferred again to different teams when they reached the age of 13. This created confusion when dealing with sibling groups with different ages. By creating new LAC Teams who are responsible for children between 0 and 18 years of age, this breaking point in relationship with social workers is prevented and better continuity for children and young people achieved. It is anticipated that this positive change will result in an increase in permanent staff within the Looked After Children and Permanency service and therefore greater stability for children when the report is next produced.
- 6.4 Whilst the structure helps to assist in achieving stability of staff, it is not the sole factor to attract permanent social workers. The aim is to create a workplace where children do not need to repeat their stories multiple times to different social workers. Therefore, currently a number of activities are underway to achieve successful recruitment and retention of social workers. This includes a clearer career development pathway for staff, focused training supported by the

Signs of Safety programme and enhanced pay and rewards for experienced social workers, social work practice consultants and team managers in hard to recruit to teams.

Appendix 1: Stability Index 2018 - Detailed Local Authority Report for Brent

Contact Officer

Onder Beter, Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.
Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0FJ.

Tel: 020 8937 1228

Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk