

## **Placement Stability**

### **National Context**

Nationally, regionally and locally there are challenges around Local Authority's ability to meet their placement sufficiency demands.

At a national level Government led reports have been commissioned around this area including the National Fostering Stocktake and Foster Care in England Report. Most recently the Government published Better Outcomes, in July 2018, which identifies 5 overriding themes to move forward quality and sufficiency of placement options for children in care.

<b>Children are listened to and involved in decisions about their lives</b>	<b>Foster parents receive the support and respect they need and deserve to care for children</b>	<b>There are enough high quality fostering placements, in the right place, at the right time</b>	<b>LAs commission placements according to the needs of the child</b>	<b>Children experience stability regardless of permanence plan</b>
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Regionally within the North East Children's Services Directors are leading a project on Placement Quality and Sufficiency.

Locally in York, we are working hard and collaboratively to seek robust future proof solutions through our Placement Review. This review is looking at fostering recruitment and retention, foster carer support and training, expectations linked to different fostering roles and levels of payment and external sufficiency provisions such as residential options.

An update on the Placement Review will be provided to Corporate Parenting Board in November 2018.

### **City of York Placement Context**

Our children in care figures have remained relatively stable at around 200 young people since 2014/15. This is against a national and regional picture of increasing numbers over the past 5 years.

At December 2017 there were 196 children in care – 111 boys and 85 girls. For the entire care population (including Short Breaks which are

not included in the children in care statistics), there were 117 fostering households.

67 of the fostering households (57%) were listed as Mainstream carers, 27 (23%) were Connected Carer households, 14 (12%) were listed solely as Short Breaks, 8 (7%) were “on hold” and 1 had temporary approval for unknown type.

73% of the 196 young people in care were in our own mainstream fostering provision, 11% placed with parents, 8% in residential provision, the remaining children were living in a variety of placements, such as adoption placements, independent living and other residential provision.

### **City of York’s Placement Stability**

There are two placement stability indicators – 3 or more moves in one year; continuously looked after for 2.5 years or more and in the same placement for at least the past 2 years.

<b>Year</b>	<b>CYC % who experienced 3+ moves in 12 months</b>	<b>National</b>
2017/18	12%	
2016/17	9%* Figures unreliable due to recording errors.	10%
2015/16	8%	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Long term stability indicator Looked after for 2.5 years or longer OR placed for adoption and of 2.5 years same placement for 2 years</b>	<b>National</b>
2017/18	59%	
2016/17	65%	70%
2015/16	68%	

## **Analysis**

It is important to consider the figures in our unique context of small numbers of fostering households; most fostering households offering multiple placements and an increase in over 10's being in care.

We know that we have fewer fostering households than we have children in care, purely mathematically this indicates a level of sufficiency challenge. It also means that we have a high number of fostering households looking after more than 1 child. This in turn means we are more likely to impact on more than 1 child when we introduce a new child into a placement. This landscape is disadvantageous when it comes to options for emergency, short and longer term placement and impacts on our placement stability.

We know more than 60% of our care population is aged 10+ and that number of 10-15 year olds in our care is increasing. When a teenager becomes looked after in York, they are more likely to remain care until they are 18 than if they were a younger child, when other permanence options are more likely to be successfully explored. We know that having lived the majority of your childhood at home the transition to care is more challenging and the feelings and resultant behaviours for the young person may be more pronounced.

Equally a teenager will often come into care in a crisis situation. It is unlikely that they will move straight to their long term placement either because it is not viable or because we are actively working a plan of rehabilitation. Only when this is not successful do we search for a longer term placement option. Both these circumstances result in placement move and therefore impact on our stability figures in the context of the second indicator.

## **Vignettes**

Although we know that stability for our children in care is of the utmost importance often a placement move is linked to positive change, such as bringing children back to York. It is also important to note that there are many different reasons for placement moves. To help illustrate this there are 3 vignettes based on real circumstances.

### **Emergency move**

AB is a 14 year old female on a full care order. She had been with her foster carers for 7 years in a long term placement. This was her first placement and it was intended that she would remain in this placement until adulthood.

The placement was disrupted over a small issue, following an argument with her foster carers due to her social media/phone use, AB was frustrated and did not return home after school that night. Her foster carers endeavoured to locate her through contacting her friends and AB was located by her adult sibling and encouraged to return to sister's property to keep safe. The police visited AB at her family member's residence and agreed that she could remain there as an emergency measure with support from EDT. Over the course of the following weekend, attempts were made by her foster carers to encourage her to return AB to placement. On the Monday morning, AB was seen by her Social Worker. She advocated clearly that she did not want to return to carers and so a short term placement was found in the fostering household where AB's older sister lives. It was felt this would lessen the impact of AB's placement disruption. AB later moved to a long term placement.

### **Child who requested to move placement**

EF is 15 year old girl. EF advocated clearly and eloquently that she was unhappy in her foster placement and that she wanted to move. EF was seeking a greater level of independence than she felt that the foster carers were promoting. The care afforded by the foster carers was appropriate and acceptable but for EF she did not feel comfortable within the household. EF is a very bright young person and as part of her coping strategies, she aims to please and does not want to disappoint people. As such she wore a cheery mask at home in placement despite struggling. Quite understandably, her foster carers were baffled when EF shared her unhappiness as her demeanour did not indicate that she was struggling.

Following EF's request, there were determined efforts to work with both EF and her foster carers to rectify the situation and offer ways to meet her needs within the placement. However, EF remained in her view and

it was clear by her presentation that her emotional welfare was being affected. Due to the lack of appropriate matches at that time EF was supported in remaining in her placement whilst we continued the search. This caused EF's anxieties to elevate and she was becoming more despondent and frustrated and it was having an impact on the other young people in placement. As such a short term placement was arranged with a foster carer for a fixed period of time to offer her respite from the stressful situation whilst we continued the search for the right long term carer.

Within days of this placement being made it was clear that EF's worry diminished and her demeanour began to improve. The temporary placement proved to be a resounding success with both EF and the foster carer building a fantastic bond very quickly. This is now EF's long term placement and she is making huge progress in all areas of her life. She has formed a strong and supportive relationship with the foster carer and is highly motivated to achieve good educational outcomes.

### **Planned Move**

GH is a 17 year old young person. He has been looked after since he was 11 years old. He experienced a number of foster placements in the York area before moving into a residential unit at 13 years old. His behaviour was impulsive, challenging and he showed little concern for his own welfare. He struggled to settle and continued to put himself and others at risk to a point where unit staff did not feel that they could meet his needs.

GH was moved to a specialist residential unit outside of York where he found some stability and made positive progress. GH remained in the unit for 18 months and experienced success but felt a strong desire to leave as he had felt that he had outgrown his life in residential care. With support, he moved into a semi independent provision in the same area when he was 16 years old.

Whilst he enjoyed his new found independence it was becoming clear that GH wanted to return to his home town of York and be closer to his family. Over the next few months GH was supported in identifying options. A foster placement was requested for him to see him through to adulthood, support him with his emerging independence skills and

provide additional emotional support. An appropriate foster carer was identified who has experience in working in this area and introductions were arranged. GH travelled over to York to meet with the foster carer to introduce himself, GH then travelled over on 2 other separate occasions to have meetings with housing workers, E2E offices and his Social Worker to familiarise himself with the area prior to his placement move.