

8th April 2014

Children's Services Improvement Activity

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr R Andrew – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Executive Summary

This attached report provides an overview of work being undertaken to deliver the priorities in the Strategic Improvement Plan with a particular emphasis on securing a ministerial decision to lift the Improvement Notice. A performance scorecard and exception report are also attached (appendix 1) for consideration.

Recommendations

1. To discuss and note improvement activity being undertaken and the readiness of the Council and partners to respond positively to the potential lifting of the Improvement Notice;
2. To consider the performance scorecard and exception report.

Background papers

Strategic Improvement Plan

Resource and legal considerations

There is a clear statutory framework and moral driver for the safeguarding and protection of children and young people. Resourcing of current and projected improvement activity is secured within the context of the wider reshaping of Children's Services provision for 2014/15. The Scrutiny and Performance Panel will be familiar with the statutory framework for the Improvement Notice and the arrangements for the Improvement Board and accountability to DfE for delivery of the priorities set out in the Strategic Improvement Plan.

Citizen impact

The continuous improvement of safeguarding and child protection outcomes for children in Walsall, aligned with wider improvement activity across the full range Children's Services provision will ensure the partnership works 'better together' for children in Walsall so that they are safe, happy, healthy and with a bright future.

Performance and risk management issues

Failure to adequately deliver sustained improvements and value for money in support for children and young people presents risks to the quality and impact of service delivery for local people and increases the risk of resource-intensive scrutiny from government and regulatory bodies. Delivery of the Strategic Improvement Plan is overseen within a strong governance framework of the Improvement Board and is increasingly embedded within substantive local governance arrangements – principally the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board and the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

Equality Implications

Equality Impact Assessments have been completed and are under ongoing review in relation to specific elements of the delivery of children and young people's services.

Consultation

There is on-going engagement on wider Children's Services priorities, with partners at a strategic level at the Improvement Board, Walsall Safeguarding Children Board, the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board. Dialogue between partners is productive, mutually challenging and impacts positively on better outcomes for children. Strong member oversight is in place with the Children & Young People's Scrutiny & Performance Panel and Corporate Parenting Group. Children and young people are actively engaged in shaping provision as set out in the Active Involvement Strategy.

Directors briefings for Children's Services staff and partners are in place on a 6 weekly basis to ensure key messages are communicated and to provide regular opportunities to capture feedback and learning from those delivering the services. Regular visits to teams and services provide additional opportunities for feedback and feed-forward as do email updates.

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1. Background

1.1 Children's Services in Walsall have undergone a programme of continuous improvement since the Improvement Notice was served in November 2012 following the 'inadequate' judgement from Ofsted on our safeguarding and child protection arrangements. In addition to the Ofsted judgement, the incoming leadership team established that there were more and deeper fundamental and systemic improvements needed across Children's Services to create a convincing platform for changes to the quality of practice, leadership and governance and the culture and capacity of the organisation and the wider partnership.

1.2 16 months on, Walsall Council and our wider Children and Young People's Partnership can evidence positive improvements and increased impact across the full spectrum of children's services, although much remains to be achieved in this complex and challenging area of the Council's work. We now believe that we are well-positioned in Walsall to sustain the momentum of improvement with the pace and focus that is required to tackle the challenges we still face following the eventual lifting of the Improvement Notice.

1.3 Subsequent Ofsted inspections of our services have evidenced our growing strengths, whilst highlighting our strong self-awareness. We face some real challenges, but we know where those challenges are and we are taking determined and focused action to tackle these issues.

1.4 We have continued to embed the optimum conditions for sustained improvement. Actions include:

- The development of a robust Walsall Safeguarding Children Board which is well-positioned to take a strong lead on driving forward improvements to safeguarding and child protection services. This includes ensuring that lessons learned from the recent Serious Case Review are fully understood by the Council and its partners and that required actions are swiftly embedded across the partnership.
- A strong and active Children and Young People's Strategic partnership with clear priorities, delivery plans, robust performance oversight and most importantly a heartfelt ambition to achieve better outcomes for children and young people in Walsall.
- Elected members playing a pro-active and high profile role in support and challenge to the performance of Children's Services. Our Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Group provide critical oversight and a forensic approach to tackling under-performance, difficult issues and obstacles to improvement.
- Commissioning of ongoing wholly independent challenge from the former Chair of the national Youth Justice Board.

- A step-change in the quality, reliability and availability of performance data to inform decision-making at a strategic and operational level.
- Quality assurance systems which provide increasingly strong evidence of the quality and effectiveness of our practice.
- An increasingly stable social care workforce with high response rates to recruitment campaigns, reducing sickness, absence and staff turnover and good succession planning leading to phased appointments to critical posts including the Principal Social Worker.
- Implementation of whole-system reshaping of Children's Services, driven by a relentless focus on improving outcomes for children, and on the child's journey from needing to receiving help wherever and whenever it is needed.

2. Progress against the three Improvement Themes

<h3>The Quality of Partnerships and Governance</h3>
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What we have achieved so far

Our partnership arrangements and governance frameworks have significantly improved and offer a firm platform for leading change and improvement.

- We have transformed the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board and now have in place a strong and effective vehicle for maintaining strategic oversight and clear accountability for keeping children safe in Walsall. The work of the WSCB is actively supported by a sharply-focused committee structure, an independent Chair, refreshed membership arrangements and direct links to the governance structures of the Council and partners. The Improvement Board Chair and DfE lead have directly observed the WSCB and have commented positively on WSCB functioning and leadership. The WSCB is well-positioned to take the baton from the Improvement Board, to sustain and reinvigorate the momentum of continuing improvements to our safeguarding and child protection arrangements.
- We have strengthened our Children and Young People's Partnership. We have agreed with our partners a clear set of priorities and delivery plans that provide a dynamic and enabling framework for working together in Walsall to improve outcomes for children. The Children and Young People's Board maintains oversight of performance across all areas and provides a critical vehicle for tackling specific challenges and blockages to improvement. This reflects an increasingly mature and high-functioning relationship between the Council and our partners in

Walsall with a shared focus on achieving the very best outcomes for children.

- We have commissioned ongoing independent scrutiny from a high-level colleague with a national profile to complement our local governance arrangements by providing robust support and challenge to the Council and our partners as we strive to continuously improve. This has led to a programme of visits and observations at all levels of children's services, providing invaluable independent critical feedback to inform and target management action.
- We have progressively strengthened our arrangements for ensuring that children and young people have a voice in the planning of their care and support and in the shaping of services. Our new Active Involvement strategy has provided a challenging framework for the Council and our partners to work together on securing a stronger voice for children throughout everything that we do.

Looking ahead

We have clear priorities for moving forward:

- As the WSCB takes on the leadership of improvements to safeguarding and child protection services we will review and refine the functioning, impact and effectiveness of the Board, and we will take swift action with our partners to tackle any under-performance in the work of the Board. The WSCB will continue to prioritise learning from local and national serious case reviews, inspection outcomes and best practice research. A particular priority for the WSCB is to oversee implementation of learning and action by all partners following the recent Serious Case Review in Walsall.
- From an increasingly strong information and evidence base we will continue to develop the wider Children and Young People's Partnership to assess our collective impact against the CYPP priorities. We will continuously review our plans and the evidence to ensure that we are focusing on the right things to secure the best possible outcomes for children in Walsall.
- Through rigorous and forensic analysis of direct practice and the development of active involvement opportunities we will continue to drive forward our collective ambition to strengthen the voice of the child throughout everything that we do.
- The development of our partnership with schools is key for driving forward school improvement arrangements and securing the very best education and learning outcomes for children in Walsall.

Capacity, Capability and Culture

What we have achieved so far

We have taken steps at all levels of the organisation and across the wider partnership to create the right conditions for sustainable change, improvement and success:

- We have agreed a new organisational model for Children's Services which is driven by a clear set of agreed principles and reflects our learning from the Improvement journey. The new arrangements are fully resourced and continue to be introduced on a phased basis to minimise adverse impact on the delivery of services to children. These arrangements provide a stronger focus on the journey of children and young people through the support, help, care and protection that they need. Distinct improvements include a multi-agency front door to children's social care, a distinct Early Help offer and the integration of Education functions into the Council following the transition from an outsourced model. This has created a more coherent and sustainable range of provision as a platform for continuous improvement. We have made good progress in recruiting to key posts including the Assistant Director Access and Achievement, the Principal Social Worker and a range of critical operational leadership roles. We have stable interim arrangements in place for the period leading up to the appointment of other important roles, including the DCS.
- We have progressively strengthened the children's social care workforce. Within the context of a robust Workforce Development Strategy we are reducing sickness and absence levels. We are retaining experienced agency staff whilst phasing-in the appointment of new social workers. Response rates to job opportunities have been positive and the morale and motivation of the workforce has notably improved. The DCS and senior leadership team have led a high-profile programme of staff engagement to communicate key messages and model a child-focused and learning culture. Our staff development programme continues to be refined to reflect our changing workforce profile and our learning from the improvement journey, with strong links to Research in Practice. We have introduced workload management systems and are tackling caseloads. We are confident that we have a positive trajectory on which to sustain these improvements.
- We have transformed the quality and reliability of our information and data, and are learning to more effectively utilise our information to inform and evidence what we do. We have invested in specialist capacity to significantly improve our performance management and quality assurance arrangements. Timely and accurate performance data is systematically used at both a strategic and operational level to inform decision-making and management action. Qualitative data is used alongside this to inform an ongoing assessment of our performance against agreed priorities for every service area. The

systems and culture of the organisation have become increasingly performance and outcome-focused, with a determined emphasis on securing the very best outcomes for children and young people from a robust evidence-base.

Looking ahead

- We will continue to fully embed the new organisational arrangements and key senior appointments for Children and Young People's Services. We will work with our partners at a strategic and operational level to secure the most effective partnership engagement and joint working arrangements to maximize the impact for children from the new structure.
- We will continue to strengthen the children's social care workforce and will work across the Council and with our partners to implement multi-agency models of frontline services that offer timely and high quality support for children and young people in Walsall.
- In November 2014 we will implement a new children's information system to replace the current PARIS ICS system. The new system will be more effectively configured to reflect the journey of the child, to support best practice and multi-agency working.

The Quality and Effectiveness of Frontline Practice

What we have achieved so far

We have maintained a relentless and determined focus on improving frontline delivery of safeguarding and child protection services. There is widespread buy-in to the vision and ambition at all levels within children's social care and our partner agencies. This is increasingly affecting behaviour and generating enthusiasm in staff at all levels, with a direct impact on the quality of work being undertaken with children and families.

- We have implemented a new area-based Early Help Offer which incorporates reshaped Children's Centre provision, multi-disciplinary Area Family Support Teams and an emerging network of Lead Professionals from across the full range of our partner agencies. The Early Help Area Cluster arrangements are a step-change in our offer to local children and families.
- We have significantly improved the 'front door' to children's social care with the introduction of the Multi-agency screening Team (MAST), new threshold arrangements, 'step-up, step-down' guidance and a supporting programme of staff development.
- There is increasing evidence to illustrate positive impact on the timeliness, quality and consistency of initial and core assessments, increasing appropriate referrals for early help and a stronger collective understanding of our thresholds. These developments include evidence of improvements to the ongoing assessment of risk in individual cases.
- The quality of child protection plans has significantly improved, reflecting a relentless and determined focus on improving the quality of direct practice, the quality of case recording and a clear and unambiguous focus on evidencing the voice of the child throughout assessment, planning and review.
- We have made substantial improvements to staff supervision, appraisal and management oversight. The quality, frequency and focus of reflective supervision is complemented by the systematic peer auditing of case files within and across teams to challenge and develop practice.

Looking ahead

- We're continuing to develop and refine our Early Help offer and lead professional arrangements across the partnership as a central pillar of our wider support for children in Walsall.

- We are prioritising the stronger engagement of partner agencies in the ongoing development of the MAST arrangements, in order to move towards a fully multi-agency co-located model of delivery.
- We will continue to develop the quality of our direct practice with children and young people through a high standard of supervision, staff development and quality assurance.

In Summary, as we approach 18 months from the onset of the Improvement Notice, Walsall Council and the wider Children and Young People's Partnership can state with confidence and clarity, from a robust evidence base, that we are a self-aware authority, well-positioned to drive forward the next phase of improvement to services for children within our strong framework of local accountability.

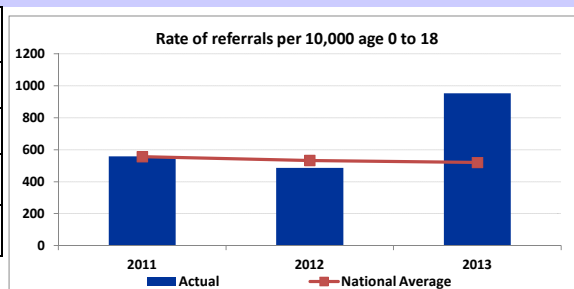
1.0 Early Help

Charts for Selected Areas

(There are known recording issues being addressed, so the below is likely to be a under-estimation)	Dec-13	Jan-14	Feb-14
Early Help Rate per 10,000 CYP	289.9	267.5	tba
↗ Average number of days to close early help assessments with no allocation (SB)	11.2	19.5	tba
↘ % of Early Help Referrals Allocated (SB)	40.2	25.4	tba

2.0 Front Door

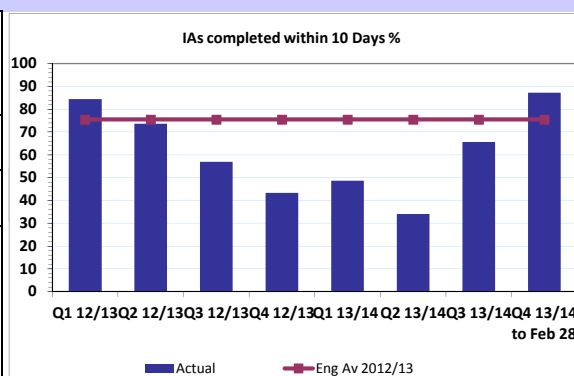
	Mar-13 Eng	Mar-13	Feb-14
Number of referrals received	593500	4454	5559
Referral rate per 10,000	520.7	703.4	953.5
↘ % re-referrals in 12 months (SB)	24.9	13.8	15.7
CiN rate per 10,000 CYP (excluding LAC and CPP)	332.2	294.5	tba



3.0 Assessments

Assessment Timeliness	Mar-13 Eng	Mar-13	Yr to end Feb 14
↘ % Initial Assessments (IA) completed < 10 days (BB)	75.5	64.9	55.5
↗ % Core Assessments (CAs) completed < 35 days (BB)	76.7	64.7	81.6

In the month of February, 85% of initial assessments have been completed within 10 working days progressing towards back in-line with the national average for March 2013.



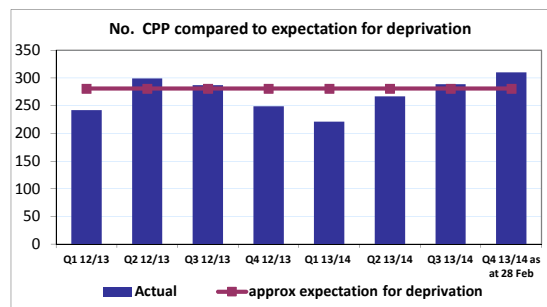
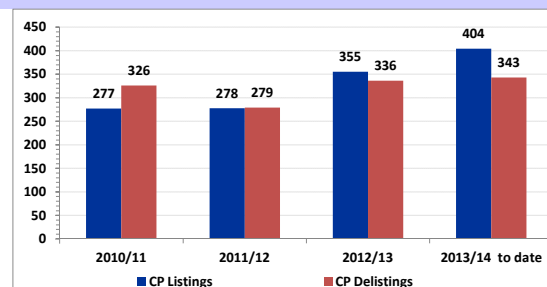
4.0 Children on a Child Protection Plan

Child Protection Plans	Mar-12	Mar-13	Feb-14
No. Child Protection Plans (CPP) at the end of year (in line is best)	230	249	310
No. de-listed during the year	248	336	343
No listed during the year	255	355	404

The number of CPPlans is in line with (within +/- 10%) the level expected for income deprivation.

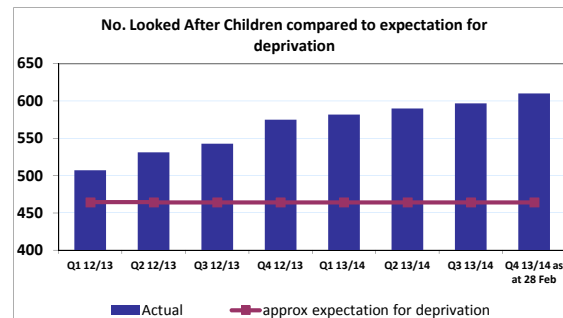
CPP Rate per 10,000 (England March 2013 = 37.9)	36.2	39.6	49.2
Repeat CPPs	Mar-13 Eng	Mar-13	Feb-14
↗ % of CPP subject to a second or subsequent CPP	14.9	10.4	11.4

10-15% is considered as ideal. Walsall's rate has remained good, indicating appropriate caution levels.



5.0 Looked After Children/ Adoption

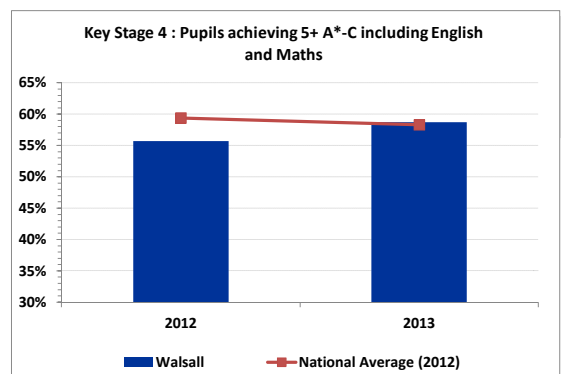
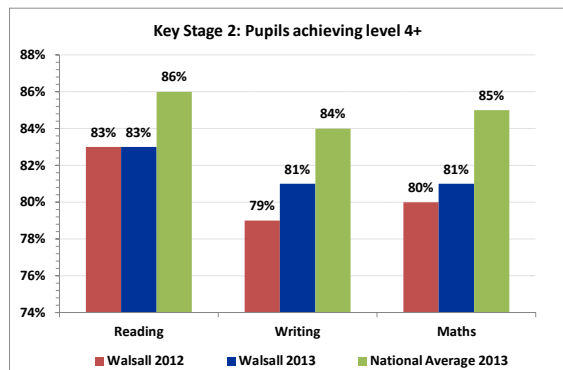
	Mar-13 Eng	Mar-13	YTD Feb-14
Numbers of Looked After Children (in line is best)	68110	575	610
LAC Rate per 10,000 CYP (in line is best)	60.0	90.8	95.9
↔ Long Term Stability of LAC (% in care 2.5 years in same placement 2 years) (BB)	67%	65.7%	66.3%
↗ Average time from Entering Care to being adopted (Days) (SB)	647	1196	785



6.0 Education - attainment/attendance

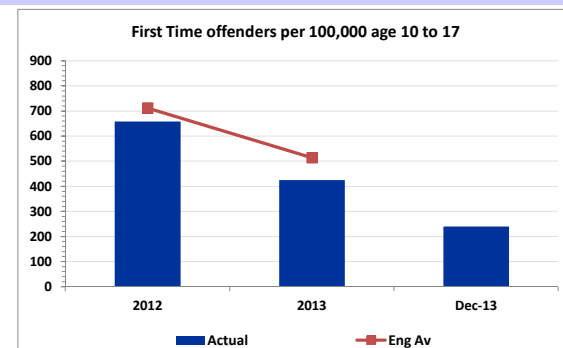
	2013 Eng	2012	2013
Early Years : Pupils Working at a Good Level Of Development (BB)	52%	51%	46%*
↔ Key Stage 2 (Level 4+) : Reading (BB)	86%	83%	83%
↗ Key Stage 2 (Level 4+) : Writing (BB)	84%	79%	81%
↗ Key Stage 2 (Level 4+) : Maths (BB)	85%	80%	81%
↗ Key Stage 4 : Pupils achieving 5+ A*-C including English and Maths (BB)	58.3%	55.7%	58.7%
↗ Key Stage 5 : Average Points per Candidate (BB)	709.1	641.9	701.3
↘ Key Stage 5: Average Points per candidate: School Sixth Forms (BB)	775.5	767.3	775
↘ Persistent Absence (All Schools) (SB)	4.9% (Terms 1 & 2)	4.8%^	5.7% (Terms 1 & 2)
↗ % of schools rated good or outstanding (BB)	70%	63%	68%
	2012 Eng	2011	2012
↗ % of pupils receiving fixed term exclusions (SB)	4.05% (304,370)	4.1% (1,910)	3.3% (1,540)
↘ % of pupils receiving permanent exclusions (SB)	0.07% (5,170)	0.04% (20)	0.06% (30)

* the methodology for measuring this indicator changed in 2012/13 so not comparable with previous year



7.0 Youth Offending / Participation/ Positive Activities

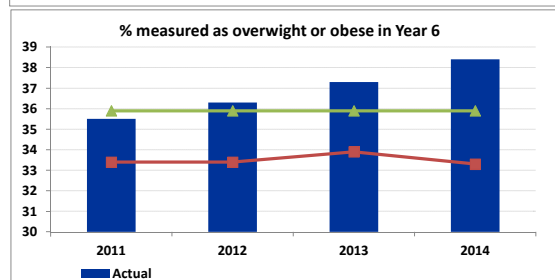
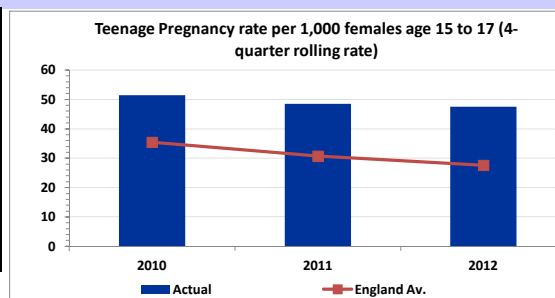
	2012	2013	Dec-13
↗ First Time offenders per 100,000 age 10 to 17 (SB)	658	425	240
↘ Re-offending rate	0.54	0.76	1.28
Numbers of Young People engaged in Positive activities (nb. generous counting rules, engagement of wide range of activities, includes repeat attendances)	14251	19310	tbc
↗ Rates of anti-social behaviour (SB)	2870	2344	1608
↗ 16 18-year-olds who are not in education, training or employment (NEET) (SB)	7.4%	6.4%	n/a



Walsall Children's Scrutiny Board - Q3 scorecard (February)

8.0 Health Outcomes

	2010	2011	2012
↗ Teenage Pregnancy Rate * (SB)	51.4	48.5	46.5
	2012	2013	2014
↘ % measured as overweight or obese in Year 6 (SB)	36.3	37.3	38.4
* Data is reported 5 Quarters in arrears			



9.0 Staffing / Workforce

	Mar-13	Jan-14	Feb-14
↔ Vacancy Rate - the number of vacant social worker posts as a % of all SW posts (SB)	14.4	19.8	19.8
↘ Turnover Rate - the number of social workers leaving as a % of workforce establishment on 1st April (SB)	10.5	18	18.8
↗ Average number of days lost to Sickness Absence by social workers. (SB)	16.5	12.4	12.3
	Dec-13	Jan-14	Feb-14
No. Agency Staff - Headcount (Snapshot, SB)	56	57	59
↗ Numbers of Agency Staff - FTE (SB)	65.6†	82.9†	tba
*- 5 week month †- 4 week month			
NB: The headcount is a count of the number of agency workers that were in work on a particular day in the month. The FTE is based on the number of hours worked from weekly timesheets submitted during the month.			

10.0 Complaints received relating to CYP

Complaints	Mar-13	YTD Feb 14
Complaints Stage 1	116	211
Complaints Stage 2	8	7
Complaints Stage 3	0	0

Legend

Direction of travel from previous period:	
↗	improved in performance
↔	Maintained level
↘	deteriorated in performance
BB	bigger is better
SB	smaller is better



Walsall Council

Children's Performance and Scrutiny Panel Exception Report

Date of Board: 8 April 2014
Reporting Period covered: February 2014

Purpose of the report:

From the high level scorecard, the key focus areas of Placement Stability was identified at the last meeting and further information requested by Children's Services Performance and Scrutiny Panel.

This information is explored below and the Panel is invited to discuss the information, offer constructive challenge based on it and to consider the potential implications and / or further areas for exploration.

Key Issues:

There is scope for Panel Members' involvement in learning from local authorities that consistently perform well around placement stability for their Looked after Children. Views on this and any expressions of interest are invited.

Summary of conclusions: Placement Stability

Looked After Childrens' short term placement stability (% with 3+ moves in 12 months) has improved (decreased) since June 2013, though the number of looked after children has shown a significant increase: so performance is now good.

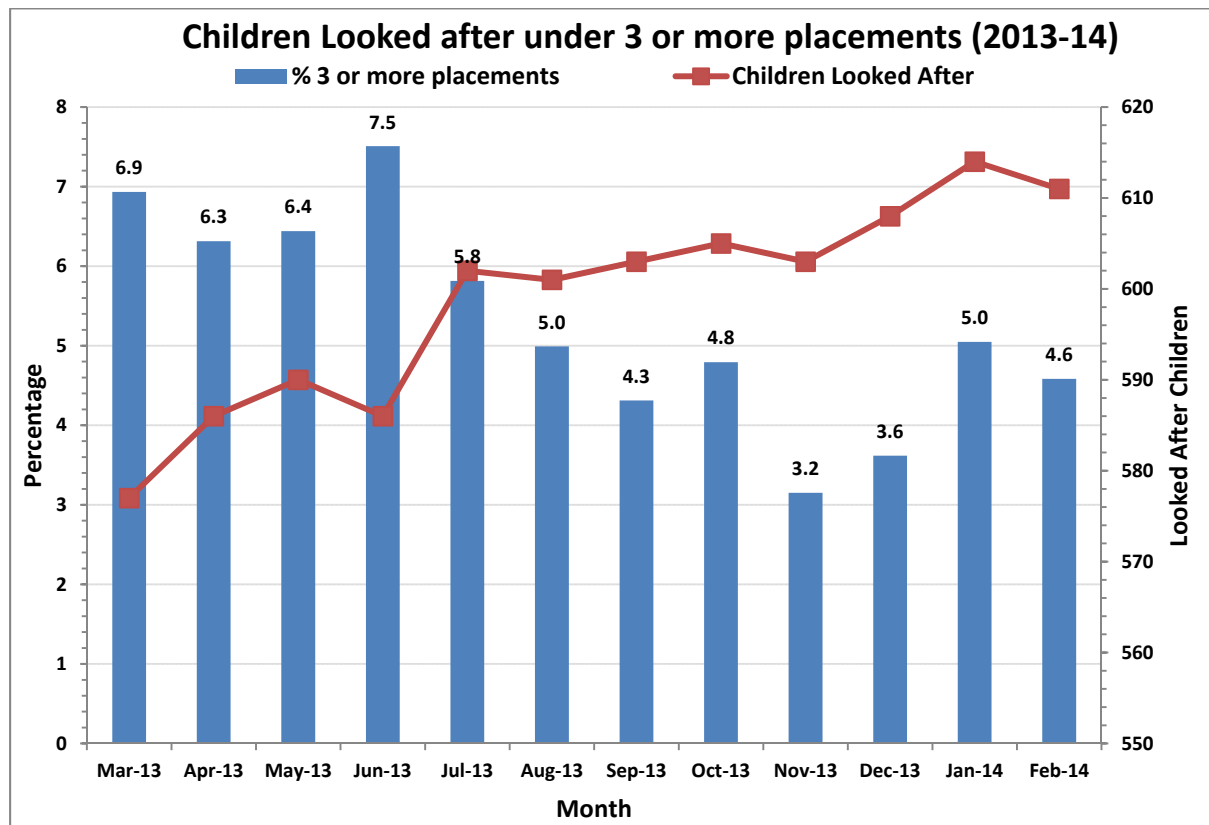
Long term stability (% Looked after for 2.5+ years and in the same placement for 2+ years) is recovering after a mid year dip in performance and still lies just below the regional and national average.

Both areas have historically had underperformance reported due to Paris reports that were not aligned to statutory guidance, this has been identified and rectified.

1. Placement Stability

Since March 2013 the number of Looked after Children has risen from 577 to 611. The proportion of children Looked After for more than a year who had 3 or more placements in 12 months (smaller is better) has fallen from 6.9% in March 2013 (40 children) to 4.6% in February 2014 (28 children). It has been found that historic Walsall reports from the Paris system on placement stability had included children

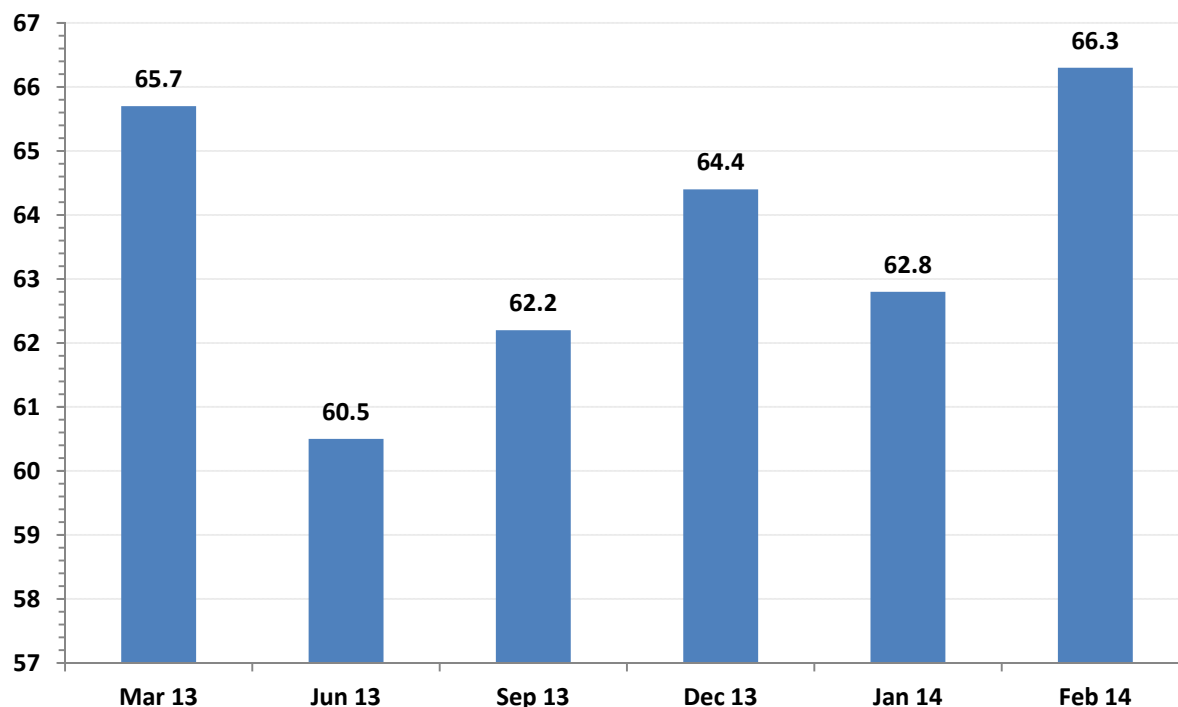
with a change of legal status but staying at the same address as having had a placement move, increasing the percentage counted as having a change of placement. This has now been rectified and performance is very good: the West Midlands regional average as at Dec 2013 was 10% and the England Average of March 2103 was 11%.



At the 31st March 2013, 66% of children that were looked after continuously for 2½ years had been in the same placement for 2 years or more (bigger is better). Since then, there was a reduction in performance to 61% at the end of quarter 1 (June 2013) and 62% at the end of quarter 2 (September 2013) of but this recovered to 64% by December 2013 and 66% in February 2014. As with short term stability above, investigation has identified that historic reports had included children with a change of legal status as well as actual placement moves. The West Midlands regional average for December 2013 was 68% as was the England average for March 2013.

Month	Mar 13	Jun 13	Sep 13	Dec 13	Jan 14	Feb 14
Children looked after for 2.5 years	282	286	286	284	282	264
In the same placement for 2 years	185	175	178	183	177	175
%	65.7	60.5	62.2	64.4	62.8	66.3

% of Children looked after for 2.5 years in the same placement for 2 years (2013-14)



NB: Benchmarking of the above 2 indicators has been discontinued in the annual publication of the 903 return by DFE. These are calculations for the guidance of Walsall Council to monitor placement stability.

The table above shows that there were 89 children who had been continuously looked after since 31st August 2011 (for 2½ years) hadn't been in the same placement since 29th February 2012 (2 years).

The table below shows:

- Change of foster placement to another foster carer happened in 41 (46.1%) of these cases;
- 5 changes happened where 2 sibling groups moved out of the area, one to Birmingham and another to Rhyl, Clwyd;
- 3 children (3%) were placed for adoption not with their current foster carer
- 14 cases (16%) have had changes of placements concerning admission to and between children's homes.

Reason for Change of Placement in the last 2 years	Number of children	%
Children's Home to Foster Care	1	1.1
Children's Home to Independent Living	1	1.1
Children's Home to Residential School	1	1.1
Placed with own parents to Independent Living	1	1.1
Placed with own parents to fostering with parent/guardian	1	1.1
Residential school to children's home	1	1.1

Placed for Adoption not with current foster carer	3	3.4
Placed with own parents who have moved out of the area	5	5.6
Change of Children's Home	6	6.7
Foster Placement to being placed with own parents	6	6.7
Foster Placement to Independent Living	6	6.7
Foster Placement to Children's Home	7	7.9
Transferred Foster Carer to Friend/Relative from other	9	10.1
Change of Foster Placement	41	46.1
Total	89	100

From the above, it would appear that 61% of the placement changes involved the child moving from one foster carer to another, between children's homes and from foster care to a children's home. It may have been possible to avoid some of these moves if the Carers skills levels were such that they felt able to meet the child's needs.

Work is underway by the service at present to ensure there are sufficient foster carers, with the right level of skills, to be able to offer enduring placements for Looked After Children. While this is taking place there is good scope to learn from high performing Local Authorities about how they have developed approaches that ensure this support is consistently available to their children.

Scrutiny Panel Members may wish to be involved in this examination and learning from its outset; expressions of interest are invited.