

Looking after Children: At What Cost? Resource Pack

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INTRODUCTION

Who is the pack for?

This pack has been designed to help local authorities to cost placements and services provided to looked after children and consequently to contribute to the planning and development of commissioning strategies. It is not intended to add to the demands on officers' time, but as a useful tool to inform existing work.

Background

All the information in this pack is based on the key messages and costing methodology from a research study¹ carried out in six local authorities in England and Wales and a subsequent piece of work to pilot the Cost Calculator – a costing tool developed as part of the research – in a local authority. The aims of the study were to explore the relationship between costs and outcomes for looked after children and to develop a methodology to calculate the costs to social services to support these children.

Who produced the pack?

It has been produced by Lisa Holmes at the Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University in consultation with Doug Lawson and Judy Stone from the Looked after Children Taskforce.

How to use the pack

This pack is made up of four separate but related parts:

Part 1: Key messages from the research

Outlines the relevant findings from the research.

Part 2: Twenty-five things you should know about the looked after population in your local authority

This part contains a list of key information that it would be useful for local authorities to know about the needs of their looked after populations in order to plan and commission services effectively.

Part 3: 'How to' documents

Provides a step-by-step guide explaining how to calculate the unit costs of providing a service to looked after children.

Part 4: The Cost Calculator

Introduces the Cost Calculator: a computer application developed by the research team for local authorities to cost the placements and services that they provide to looked after children. All of the unit cost calculations in part two are incorporated into the Cost Calculator.

Calculating unit costs

The costs calculated for the research incorporate all the activity undertaken by social services personnel to support looked after children as well as placement costs. To include all these activity costs in the cost calculations this resource pack helps to identify all the tasks that are carried out to support looked after children before, during and at the end of their placements.

The methodology used is based on the principles for calculating unit costs outlined in *Unit Costs – Not Exactly Child's Play*². The research team have adopted the bottom-up approach to calculate the unit costs. While this approach is more time consuming and complex it does allow the many variations associated with providing a service to looked after children to be taken into account when assigning costs (see page 16 for further details of the variations in costs).

How does the information in this pack link to other research on costing services?

The research that has informed this resource pack was one of the 13 studies in the Costs and Effectiveness initiative. This initiative was commissioned by central Government and aimed to explain some of the variation in the use of resources for children in need and develop a better understanding of the costs and consequences of different interventions.

1 Ward, H., Holmes, L., Soper, J. and Olsen, R. (2004) *Costs and Consequences of Different Types of Child Care Provision*, Loughborough: Loughborough University, Centre for Child and Family Research

2 Beecham, J. (2000) *Unit Costs: Not Exactly Child's Play*, London: Department of Health.

The studies adopted a complimentary methodology for calculating costs, therefore the unit costs reported in this pack can be linked with the costs calculated for the other studies, for example, the Cost of a Core Assessment by Cleaver, Walker and Meadows³ and the Costs and Outcomes of Non-Infant Adoption by Selwyn et al⁴.

How does the information in this pack support the Government's vision for children's services?

Targeting resources more efficiently for the long-term benefit of children and young people is an important Government priority. Choice Protects seeks to develop a more efficient planned approach to commissioning placements for children in order to improve placement stability and outcomes. The Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme looks towards a more efficient use of resources across children's services in order to achieve better outcomes for children and young people, and to support better preventative working. And, more widely, as part of the 2004 Spending Review, local authorities have been tasked with achieving an annual efficiency gain of at least 2.5% per annum in 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08. As the Gershon review of public sector efficiency⁵ makes clear, this is not about cutting budgets and services, the aim is to release resources through improved efficiencies which can then be used to strengthen service provision.

This resource pack is intended to help local authorities understand the costs associated with placements and services for looked after children. Greater transparency in costs will help authorities to see the links between investments and outcomes for children, and hence to make informed far-sighted decisions about how to allocate resources for the greatest benefit of children and young people.

3 Cleaver, H., Walker, S. and Meadows, P. (2004) *Assessing Children's Needs and Circumstances: The Impact of the Assessment Framework*, London: Jessica Kingsley.

4 Selwyn, J., Sturgess, W., Quinton, D. and Baxter, C. (2003) *Costs and Outcomes of Non-Infant Adoption*, Report to the Department of Health, Bristol: University of Bristol, Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies.

5 Gershon, P. (2004) *Releasing Resources to the Front Line: Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency*, Norwich: HMSO.

6 Tapsfield, R. and Collier, F. (2005) *The Cost of Foster Care: Investing in our Children's Future*, London: BAAF and The Fostering Network.

1

The following four pages outline some of the key messages from the research. This information has also been made available on the Every Child Matters website (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/fostercare) in the form of a practice guide (Looking after children: at what cost?).

Why raise cost awareness?

Being able to cost children's placements accurately facilitates comparisons between the relative value, both in terms of costs and quality, of different types of care and makes it easier to estimate the potential value of introducing a range of alternative packages.

Key points

- Variations in unit costs can be attributed to authority factors, placement factors and child-related factors.
- Authority factors include; for example, geography, thus travelling times; policy and procedures; staffing and resources.
- Placement factors are related to placement type, placement fee or cost; provider (for example, agency or local authority) and location.
- Child-related factors include: disability; emotional or behavioural difficulty; and offending behaviour. The circumstances of asylum seeking children also produce different cost pathways.
- The process of maintaining a placement accounts for between 92% and 96% of the total costs to social services of looking after a child.
- Placements out of the area of the authority are more costly both in terms of expenditure and children's well being.
- A small number of children with complex needs who require specialist placements and services can skew the costs of the looked after population in an authority.
- The children in the study fell into eleven groups categorised by single or multiple combinations of additional support needs (for example emotional or behavioural difficulties or disabilities). There were five simple groups displaying none or one of the support needs, and six complex groups, displaying two or more additional support needs.
- Children who display none of these factors cost substantially less to look after than those who display one of them, and costs were found to be even higher for those children who display combinations of two or more factors.
- 27% of the sample showed no evidence of high support needs.
- Children who show emotional or behavioural difficulties and offending behaviour are disproportionately more costly to look after than those who display only one of these attributes.

Developing unit costs

The research team identified and calculated unit costs of eight processes that support the case management of looked after children, based on the looked after children case management operations outlined in the Core Information Requirements Process Model⁷ (see Part 3 for further details).

These processes are detailed below:

Process one: Decide child needs to be looked after and finding first placement

Process two: Care Planning (including care plan, PEP and health assessment)

Process three: Maintaining the placement

Process four: Cease being looked after

Process five: Finding a subsequent placement

Process six: Review

Process seven: Legal processes

Process eight: Transition to leaving care services

The Cost Calculator

The unit costs for each of the eight processes, along with the placement and needs data collected for the sample children have been used to develop a computer application to facilitate cost calculations. This Cost Calculator has been developed as a practice tool to be used by local authorities.

The model calculates the cost of each of the processes, taking into account the many variations according to placement type, the child's characteristics and so forth. The total cost of each placement then forms the cost of a care episode. Aggregate costs can be produced both for individual children and for care populations. The Cost Calculator is described in more detail in Part 4 of this resource pack.

Placement costs

The cost of maintaining the placement (process three), which includes both the placement costs and all the ongoing activity to support the child in their placement accounts for between 92% and 96% of the total costs to social services. There

are substantial differences between the different types of placements. The standard unit cost for maintaining a child for a week in residential care is eight times that of the cost of foster care, 9.5 times that of a placement with relatives or friends and 12.5 times that of a placement with own parents.

Placement change

Frequent changes in placement have a knock-on effect on the costs of other processes.

The process of finding a new placement for a child who is considered to be difficult to place takes, on average, between eighteen and twenty-four extra working hours. This more than doubles the level of activity for the process.

Out of authority placements

Placements out of the area of the placing authority are more costly both in terms of expenditure and the children's well being. Financial costs are increased both as a result of higher placement fees and because of the additional activity by social workers to support children in their placements.

Many of the young people who were interviewed indicated that the distance between their placement and their friends and family was a significant issue. Close placements were generally perceived to be more successful:

I like everything about living here. There is nothing I don't like. This is where I've been happiest. It's close to school, friends and family; it's just better here. (Young man, 14, foster care)

Packages of care

The findings highlight the importance of considering packages of care, such as the provision of additional support services to meet the needs of the child alongside their placement.

Case studies indicate that placements are less likely to break down if ongoing services are provided to support the placement, for example respite care.

⁷ Department of Health (2003) *Children's Social Services Core Information Requirements Process Model*, London: Department of Health.

There is evidence that the development of care packages across agencies resulted in placement stability. One of the young men interviewed was only able to continue in his education provision as a result of the level of support offered by the staff in his residential placement.

The school was talking about excluding him again, but we won't have that, and we'll do anything to avoid that. A support worker goes with him...We had to go in and sell ourselves really, and demonstrate the level of support which is what we've done.
(Residential key worker)

Furthermore, the findings indicate that in the participating authorities packages of care are provided more frequently alongside agency placements than those provided by the local authority.

How costs accrue

Timelines for selected children with different needs can illustrate how costs accrue to both social services and to other agencies as children show increasingly complex combinations of need (see pages 7-9).

The timelines also illustrate how the costs of a care episode can vary according to the child's needs and the services that are provided. For example, the total cost of looking after a child without any additional support needs, who remained in the same local authority foster placement over a twenty-month time period, was £35,106. In comparison, the total cost was more than six times higher (£215,756)⁸ for a child with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

These higher costs were largely as a result of the child being placed in more expensive agency residential units and the additional support services that were being provided to meet his needs.

Skewed costs

A small number of children with complex needs who require specialist placements and services can skew the costs of the looked after population

in an authority. Although the proportion of these children in an authority is low (approximately 2% in the study sample) it is fundamental to acknowledge that the cost of looking after them will be disproportionately high and to factor this into future commissioning strategies.

Systems approach

The findings demonstrate the importance of adopting a systems approach to analysing the costs of looking after children. The costs incurred by placing children away from home need to be considered within the context of the costs of providing services to all children in need.

A systems approach should also demonstrate how costs are spread across agencies so that reducing costs to one may increase the costs to others.

False economies

For some children postponing service provision only reduces short-term costs; in the long term more costly services and placements are required increasing the overall cost of the care episode.

Additional support services might help carers meet children's needs and obviate more costly placements at a later stage. Information from family placement workers indicates that some authorities are providing a higher level of support (two and a half additional hours per month) to their kinship carers in comparison with the support provided to local authority foster carers.

The future

The calculations that went into the unit costs developed for this study are relatively simple and could easily be replicated (see Part 3 of this resource pack for details).

The complexities lie in modelling the social care processes and in particular the variations that reflect the diversity of children's needs and the complex service responses. The Cost Calculator is able to produce aggregate costs and has some predictive power. It is anticipated that use of the model will provide a basis for improved planning and commissioning of services.

8 These costs are based on 2000-2001 prices

Needs, costs and outcomes

One of the key messages from this research is the importance of balancing financial costs with well being costs. Hence, providing a cost effective service that meets the needs of the looked after population, rather than cost cutting, if the result is going to be detrimental to the child's outcomes. Increased transparency in costs and linking these to children's needs and outcomes helps local authorities to make informed decisions about the services they provide. Timelines have been created to provide an illustration of the differences between costs, experiences and outcomes for individual children with different needs.

The case studies below outline the care experiences of two children with very different needs, Jennifer who has no additional support needs and remained in a stable placement with local authority foster carers, and Michael, a boy with emotional and behavioural difficulties who was placed in an agency residential unit following a series of unplanned placement changes.

The corresponding timelines for Jennifer and Michael show the level of activity and the services provided by both social services and other agencies over a twenty-month time period, between February 2000 and October 2001. They illustrate how costs can accrue over a period of time when children show increasingly complex combinations of need and are a useful way of depicting how care packages that meet the needs of the child can help to improve outcomes. For example, the placement key worker, personal teaching assistant and the school worked together to support Michael with his education, resulting in him remaining in mainstream school and receiving a certificate of achievement.

The methodology outlined in Part 3 is used to calculate the total costs incurred by social services to look after Jennifer and Michael; with the cost of each of the processes being added together to give a total cost to social services. Rudimentary costs to other agencies have also been added, based on cost estimates from other research⁹.

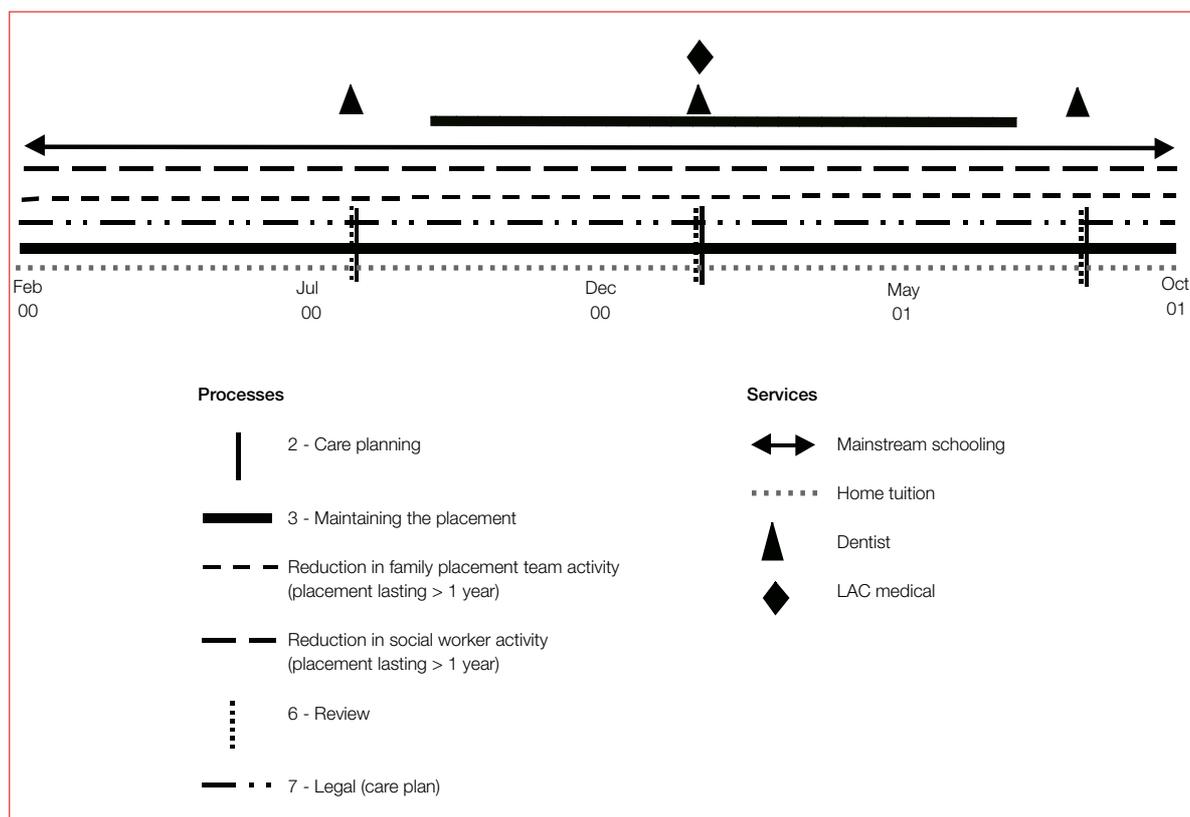
Jennifer is an example of a child with no additional support needs and was aged thirteen at the start of the time period shown below. She first became looked after when she was six as a result of abuse. From December 1998 and throughout the time period shown below she was placed, along with her sister, with local authority foster carers. Prior to this placement Jennifer experienced four other placements, all with local authority foster carers. Reviews were held at six monthly intervals and her care plan was also updated six monthly.

During the time period Jennifer attended mainstream school, and also received home tuition for two hours a week from September 2000 until July 2001, when she was in year 10, to help her prepare for her GCSE's. (This was a scheme introduced in the local authority to improve the education outcomes of looked after children and was funded by a Quality Protects grant).

Jennifer attended six monthly dental check-ups and her annual looked after child medical.

⁹ For example see: Netten, A. and Curtis, L. (2004) *Unit Costs of Health and social care 2004*, University of Kent: Personal Social Services Research Unit.

Timeline for Jennifer



The thick, black horizontal line on Jennifer's timeline above shows the ongoing process of maintaining her in her placement. This placement began some time before the time period shown (December 1998) and continued beyond October 2001, therefore the placement start or end are not shown.

The total cost incurred to look after Jennifer for the twenty-month time period was £35,106 (the cost to social services was £27,125 and £7,981 to other agencies). The costs incurred to look after Michael for the same time period were more than six times higher than for Jennifer (total cost £215,756). The higher costs to social services (£171,861) were as a result of Michael being placed in a more expensive placement provision (agency residential unit) and also because of the number of previous placement

changes which made the process of finding new placements incrementally more expensive in terms of a higher level of activity by his social worker to find a placement to meet his needs. As Michael's timeline illustrates he received a number of additional support services (ongoing counselling and a personal teaching assistant), the provision of these services, along with his temporary school exclusions increased the costs incurred by other agencies (£43,895)¹⁰.

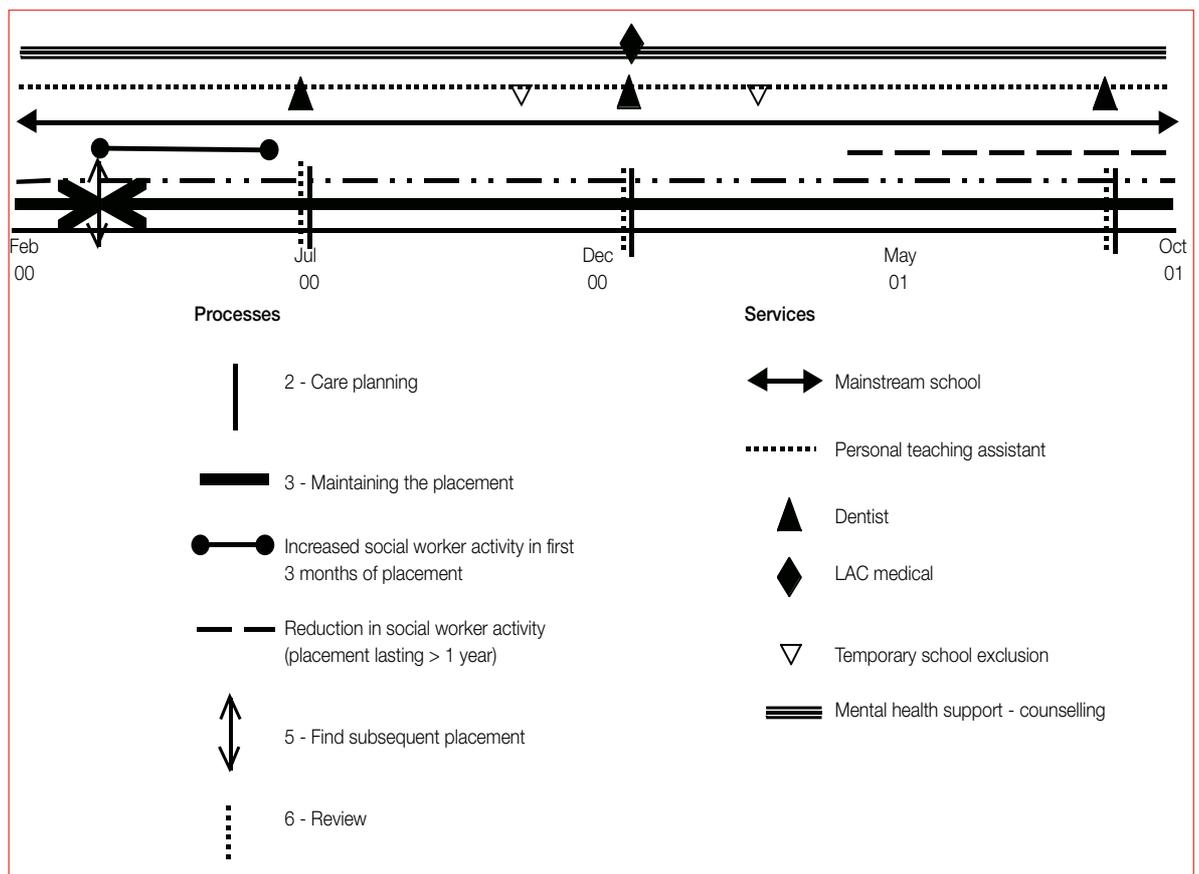
¹⁰ These costs are based on 2000-2001 prices

Michael was aged thirteen at the start of the time period shown below and is an example of a child with emotional and behavioural difficulties, who often displays challenging behaviour both in his placement and at school. He first became looked after at the age of eight as a result of abuse. Between 1993 when he was first placed and the start of the time period shown in the time line below Michael experienced fifteen different placements, five with foster carers, two with relatives and the remaining eight in residential units. During the early part of 2000 Michael moved through a series of residential placements very quickly as a result of being bullied and was eventually placed in an agency residential unit in March 2000 where he stayed for the rest of the time period shown below.

Michael has a statement of special educational needs as a result of his emotional and behavioural difficulties. During the time period he attended mainstream school and received additional support from a personal teaching assistant for fifteen hours a week. He was also temporarily excluded from school on two separate occasions, in October 2000 and March 2001. In addition to the support he was receiving from his teaching assistant Michael was also supported in school by his key worker from the residential unit by prior arrangement with the school (see the quote from his key worker on page 6). Following this level of continuing support Michael's behaviour improved throughout the summer term of 2001 and resulted in him receiving a certificate of achievement at the end of term.

During the time period shown below Michael attended weekly counselling sessions to address the abuse prior to him becoming looked after and the bullying he experienced in a number of his placements.

Timeline for Michael



As with Jennifer's timeline, the thick, black horizontal line above shows the ongoing process of maintaining Michael in his placement. However, in March 2000 Michael changed placements, the arrows on this same line depict the change and the process of finding a new placement occurred. Furthermore this placement change resulted in increased activity by his social worker for the first three months of his new placement.

PART 2: TWENTY-FIVE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE LOOKED AFTER POPULATION IN YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY

2

We anticipate that the research findings will assist local authorities with their future planning and commissioning strategies for looked after children. In the study we found that variations in unit costs can be attributed to authority factors, placement factors and/or child related factors. Detailed below is a set of questions that we have identified as being fundamental for local authorities to plan service provision in the future and provide a cost effective strategy both in terms of expenditure and children's well being.

Children's needs

There are substantial variations in costs and the types of placements provided for children *without* any evidence of additional support needs. The more efficient local authorities have the least variation in costs for these children and tend to place them with either kinship carers or local authority foster carers. Therefore it would be useful to know:

- 1. The number/percentage of children looked after who do not have any additional support needs**
- 2. Where these children are placed**

The findings indicate that the local authorities are restricted in their choice of placements for children with more complex needs. Having information available to cost placements accurately would facilitate comparisons between the relative value, both in terms of costs and quality of different placement types. Therefore it would be useful to know:

- 3. The number/percentage of children looked after with the following additional support needs:**
 - a) emotional or behavioural difficulties**
 - b) disabilities**
 - c) offending behaviour**
- 4. Where these children are placed**

Children who show two or more of the above additional support needs are disproportionately more costly to look after than those who display only one of the attributes. Therefore it would be useful to know:

- 5. The number/percentage of children looked after who display a combination of two or more of the additional support needs**
- 6. Where these children are placed**

Outcomes are least favourable and the costs disproportionately high for children who display either emotional or behavioural difficulties and are also committing criminal offences. Therefore it would be useful to know:

- 7. The number/percentage of children with emotional or behavioural difficulties who are also committing criminal offences**
- 8. Where these children are placed**
- 9. What additional support services these children are receiving, for example, psychotherapeutic support**

The circumstances leading to unaccompanied asylum seeking children becoming looked after are very different to other children in the looked after population. Whilst the costs of looking after this group of children are not necessarily higher than for those who do not have any additional support needs their care pathways are very different. Therefore it would be useful to know:

- 10. The number/percentage of unaccompanied asylum seeking children looked after away from home**
- 11. Where these children are placed**
- 12. The number of these children who need translation /interpreter/education support services and the accessibility of these services**

Children with extensive needs/high cost children

In most local authorities there are a small number of children with very extensive needs who require highly specialised and extremely expensive care, providing placements and additional support services for these children can skew the total costs of the looked after population in an authority. Therefore it would be useful to know:

- 13. How many high cost children there are in the looked after population**
- 14. The proportion of these children with disabilities**
- 15. How much longer it will be necessary to provide a placement for these young people**
- 16. The proportion of the budget for looked after children that is spent on these children**

Age

Other studies have shown that a) after six months in care or accommodation children are less and less likely to return home and b) children who entered care before their fourth birthday and do not leave within a year are likely to remain looked after until their teens. Therefore it would be useful to know:

17. The ages of all children who have been looked after for six months or more

Supporting placements

The findings from the research highlight the importance of considering packages of care, such as the provision of additional support services to meet the needs of the child alongside their placement. Case studies indicate that placements are less likely to break down if ongoing services are provided to support children and their carers. Therefore it would be useful to know:

18. The types of additional services that are provided to support placements with local authority foster placements, for example, respite care or psychotherapeutic support

19. How these additional services compare with those provided by private and voluntary agencies

Placements with family and friends foster carers

Family and friends foster carers, like all foster carers, particularly need to be paid a reasonable allowance in order to maximise the potential for placement stability. They may also need additional support to meet the child's needs. Therefore it would be useful to know:

20. The proportion of children looked after who are placed with family and friends foster carers

21. The arrangements that are in place to provide support to these children and their carers

22. Whether there are other children being cared for by family and friends who are receiving support from the local authority under other types of arrangements e.g. Section 17 Children Act 1989

Placements out of the area of the authority

Placements out of the area of the authority are more costly both in terms of expenditure and the children's well being. Therefore it would be useful to know:

23. The proportion of the looked after population who are placed out of the area of the authority and whether the children's needs are being adequately met in the placements.

24. Whether there is alternative provision within the area of the authority that could comparably meet the needs of such children, and if not what provision should be developed to prevent the need for children to go out of authority and to achieve better outcomes

Placement change

Frequent changes of placement are not only costly in themselves, but also have a knock-on effect on the costs of other processes. Children who become difficult to place are more likely to require out of authority placements. Therefore it would be useful to know:

25. The number of children who have experienced placements that last for less than 28 days and how much this rate of movement is costing the local authority

Overall, being able to cost children's placements accurately would facilitate comparisons between the relative value, both in terms of costs and quality, of different types of care and make it easier to estimate the potential value of introducing a range of alternative packages of support.

3

This part of the pack provides the information to enable local authorities to calculate unit costs for their looked after populations. It is made up of two sections: a step-by-step guide that details a 'bottom-up' methodology to calculate unit costs for looked after children and a series of tables to use as templates to replicate the methodology. As stated in the introduction the methodology outlined in this section is based on the principles for calculating unit costs outlined in *Unit Costs – Not Exactly Child's Play*¹¹.

The research has provided estimated unit costs for children with different profiles of need. Authorities can either use these unit costs produced by the research team or calculate their own costs using the methodology outlined below based on their own activity and salary information.

¹¹ Beecham, J. (2000) *Unit Costs: Not Exactly Child's Play*, London: Department of Health.

3a: Calculating unit costs for looked after children: a step-by-step guide

Social work processes for looked after children

The following eight social work processes for which unit costs have been calculated are based on the case management operations that underpin the task of looking after children outlined in the Core Information Requirements Process Model (Department of Health, 2003)¹².

Process one: Decide if child needs to be looked after and find first placement

Process two: Care planning (including the care plan, personal education plan and health assessment)

Process three: Maintaining the placement

Process four: Cease being looked after

Process five: Finding a subsequent placement

Process six: Review

Process seven: Legal interventions¹³

Process eight: Transition to leaving care services

All looked after children will go through the first four processes during the time they spend in care or accommodation. Processes five to eight will need to be undertaken for some, but not all children, for example, those who remain looked after for a month or more will be subject to a looked after review. Process three is an ongoing process and includes both the placement cost and the continuing activity provided by social services personnel to support the child in their placement.

Once you have calculated unit costs for each of the processes above it is then possible to explore how costs can accrue over time for individual children (see pages 6-9). Using the Cost Calculator it is also possible to aggregate these costs for groups of children with different needs and for the looked after population in your authority.

What you need to do

1. To calculate unit costs for the eight processes outlined above based on what actually happens in your authority you will need to use activity data gathered from social services personnel. Alternatively, you can use the activity data collected by the research team, however, these figures are based on the average activity from six local authorities in England and Wales and some of the activities are likely to differ for your authority.
2. If you intend to collect and use your own activity data you are advised to use the tables provided in Part 3b of this resource pack to record the breakdown of activities.
3. You are advised to gather this information through team meetings where it is possible to obtain a consensus view about levels of activity with the minimum of imposition to staff.

When attending team meetings you need to ascertain what activities are carried out by whom and how long each of these activities takes.

4. With each team work through the processes that are most relevant to them. For example, discuss process one (decide a child needs to be looked after) with referral/initial response teams (use the tables in Part 3b).
5. Once you have identified the time taken to complete the various activities for each of the processes calculate the total number of hours activity for each worker for each of the eight processes.

¹² Department of Health (2003) Children's *Social Services Core Information Requirements Process Model*, London: Department of Health.

¹³ Within this study it was only possible to calculate the cost of obtaining a Care Order. Further work is required to cost other socio-legal processes, for example, obtaining a Residency Order.

6. In order to calculate the unit cost for each of the eight processes you will need the salary scales of all relevant personnel. (You are advised to carry out the calculations using the mid-point of each of the salary scales or the point at which the majority of workers are paid in your authority).

7. Use the cost schema 10.3 for a Social worker (children) in the annual Unit Costs of Health and Social Care publication¹⁴ to ensure that overheads and capital costs are included in the calculations. To calculate the unit costs per hour for each worker you need to apply this schema for each type of personnel, replacing the salary figure in 'A' with the appropriate salaries from your authority.

Schema 10.3 Social worker (children)¹⁵

Costs and unit estimation	2004/2005 value	Notes
A. Salary	£24,841 per year	Information taken from a survey carried out by PSSRU of 40 authorities during 2005 found that the midpoint between the average minimum was £23,632 outside London and £29,540 in London. The midpoint between the average minimum and average maximum was £24,841. Wage levels reflect the average level of wages paid in 27 of the authorities. The information was weighted by authority size and social work team leader staff numbers. Salaries ranged from £17,409 to £37,862.
B. Salary oncosts	£2,954 per year	Employers' national insurance plus 4.5 per cent of salary for employers' contribution to superannuation.
C. Qualifications		
D. Overheads	£4,169 per year	Fifteen per cent of salary costs for management and administrative overheads. ¹
E. Capital overheads	£2,106 per year	Based on the new build and land requirements for a local authority office and shared facilities for waiting, interviews and clerical support. ^{2,3} Capital costs have been annuitised over 60 years at a discount rate of 3.5 per cent.
F. Travel		No information is readily available about travel costs for social workers.
Working time	42 weeks per annum 37 hours per week	Includes 20 days annual leave and 10 statutory leave days. Ten days sickness leave and 10 days for study/training have been assumed.
Client related work <i>Ratio of direct to indirect time on: Home visits</i>	1:1.5	In a study of the determinants of expenditure on children's personal social services, Carr-Hill et al. ⁴ found that the annual input per child was 2,973 minutes, or about 50 hours per week in 1998 and that 40 per cent of social work time directly associated with clients was on home visits. Travel time was included where appropriate.
Client related work	1:0.5	In a study commissioned by the Department of Health, ⁵ it was found that 66 per cent of a children's social worker's time was spent on client-related activities, allowing an hour spent on client-related activities to be costed. This is not the same as the cost per hour spent with a client.
London multiplier	1.20 x A 1.57 x E	Based on the same source as the salary data. Building Cost Information Service and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
Non-London multiplier	0.93 x (A to D) 0.96 x E	Allows for the lower costs associated with working outside London compared to the national average cost. Building Cost Information Service and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Unit costs available 2004/2005

£22 per hour; £33 per hour of client-related work; £55 per hour's home visit; £105 per child per week (includes A to E).

1 Knapp, M., Bryson, D. & Lewis, J. (1984) The comprehensive costing of child care: the Suffolk cohort study, Discussion Paper 355, Personal Social Services Research Unit, University of Kent.

2 Building Cost Information Service (2005) *Surveys of Tender Prices*, March, BCIS, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, London.

3 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Summer 2004.

4 Roy, A., Carr-Hill, R., Nigel, R. & Smith, P.C. (1999) The determinants of expenditure on children's personal social services, *British Journal of Social Work*, 29, 679-706.

5 Department of Health (2001) *The Children in Need Census 2001 – National Analyses*, www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/work_pro/analysis1.htm.

14 Netten, A. and Curtis, L. (2004) *Unit Costs of Health and social care 2004*, University of Kent: Personal Social Services Research Unit.

15 Schema reproduced with permission from PSSRU, The University of Kent.

8. Once you have calculated the unit cost per hour for each worker using the methodology detailed above this figure needs to be multiplied by the number of hours activity for each process.
9. For each of the processes add together the cost of each of the workers activity to give you a total process cost.

Variations

The methodology outlined above will enable you to develop standard unit costs for each of the processes to support a looked after child. However, for all of the processes variations in activity have been identified by the researchers. These can be attributed to the following:

Authority factors – these include variations in policies and practice, for example, the level of management at which decisions to fund agency placements are made, geographical location, staffing and the availability of resources.

Placement factors – both variations in placement fees or allowances paid to carers and also the level of activity by social services personnel to support children in their placements. For example, additional activity by family placement/fostering teams to support local authority foster carers.

Child-related factors – these include disabilities, emotional or behavioural difficulties and offending. The circumstances of unaccompanied asylum seeking children were also found to produce different cost pathways.

All of the variations in activity identified by the researchers have been incorporated into the Cost Calculator. These variations in activity are also detailed in the tables in section b of this part of the resource pack.

A note on placement costs

Providing information about the ongoing placement costs was problematic for some of the authorities participating in the research and most reported difficulties in calculating the unit costs of local authority foster and residential care (PAF indicators B9 and B10). As a result we had to take the best information available at the time

and as this information improves it can be incorporated into the Cost Calculator. The figures that have been used are detailed below, these are all in addition to the activity undertaken to support a child in their placement:

Local authority foster care (including family and friends foster carers): Allowances and fees paid to the carers (including any additional payments, for example, birthday, Christmas, clothing allowances).

Local authority residential units: Taken the unit cost figure calculated for PAF indicator B9.

Placements provided by agencies/voluntary organisations: An average of the fees paid by the authorities for each of the SSDA 903 placement types (*Note: due to substantial variations in fees for agency placements these calculations have been improved for the subsequent pilot phase – see page 35*).

3b: Calculating unit costs for looked after children: tables

This section of the pack consists of a series of tables. For each of the eight processes that are undertaken by social services to support looked after children there are two types of tables.

The first set of tables break down all the activities that the research team identified for each of the processes and were used by the team to gather the activity information from the local authorities taking part in the study. These tables have been left blank for you to use as templates to gather the activity information for your own authority.

The second set of tables contains the activity data gathered by the research team, including the average figures and all the variations in activity outlined on the previous page. These figures have been included so that they can be used as a benchmark for when you are gathering activity data in your own authority.

When you complete this set of tables you may find it useful to consider/remember the following:

- You may find that it is not possible for workers to identify the time taken for every single task and that it is necessary to group together some of the tasks.
- Not all activities identified for each of the processes will be undertaken in your authority, only include those that are actually undertaken.
- There may be additional activities undertaken in your authority; use the **Other** category to record these activities and the amount of time spent on them.
- You need to ensure that you do not 'double count' any activities.
- The **Total time** figures are averages for a child placed with local authority foster carers, within the area of the local authority. These figures are for children without any additional support needs, for example, disabilities.
- Do not include activity by the family placement or fostering team (social worker, team manager and administrator) for any placements *other than with* local authority foster carers.
- CWD is the abbreviated term used for children with disabilities.
- UASC is the abbreviated term used for unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- One of the identified variations in activity according to children's needs was whether they were classified as 'difficult to place'. The following definition was agreed with the six authorities participating in the research:
 - A child aged ten or over with emotional or behavioural difficulties and a disability or with emotional or behavioural difficulties and a frequent mover. (The PAF indicator A1 was used to define a frequent mover).

You may of course want to use your own definition of a child who is 'difficult to place' in line with the difficulties you have been experiencing placing children with particular needs.

- The research also highlighted that some local authorities do not always have clear criteria or definitions for identifying children with disabilities or those with emotional or behavioural difficulties. The following criteria were used by the research team, you may already have clear definitions of emotional or behavioural difficulties, or wish to use your own set of criteria. However, it is important to be consistent in the definitions that are used.
- Criteria for emotional or behavioural difficulties (EBD):
 - Permanent exclusion from school
 - Statement of special educational needs in response to emotional or behavioural difficulties
 - Attendance at a special school for BESD
 - More than one placement breakdown as a result of their behaviour
 - In receipt of mental health support
 - Refusal of mental health support
 - Self-harming
 - Prostitution
 - Eating disorders
- Criteria for Children with disabilities (CWD):
 - Disability had been recorded as the reason looked after
 - Disability had been recorded as the primary need code for the CiN census
 - The child was allocated to the disability team
 - The child was on the register of disabilities

Process 1 Decide child needs to be looked after (including activity for first placement)

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Family placement team	Other social services personnel
Visits to family		Fact finding/liasing within social services					
Travel time for visits		Fact finding/liasing outside social services					
Introduction to placement		Visits/discussions with carers/potential placement					
Obtaining consent for child to be looked after		Before resource allocation meeting (Organisation/ room booking)					
Telephone calls to family		During resource allocation meeting Who goes?					
		How long?					
Client visits to office		Where held?					
		Travel					
Other		Waiting time					
		After resource allocation meeting Minutes/reports					
		Letters					
		Form filling					
		LAC/ICS paperwork					
		Case records					
		Other					

Process 1 Decide child needs to be looked after (including activity for first placement) activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Direct client related contact and indirect office based tasks Placement Planning meeting activity includes the write up	10¼ hrs	PLUS 8hrs for a residential placement – (completion of an assessment of child's needs for the placement) PLUS 8hrs to find a residential placement PLUS 8hrs to place a child in an out of authority placement	PLUS 24 hrs to find a residential placement for a difficult to place child PLUS 31 hrs to find an appropriate placement for CWD	PLUS 2hrs if a placement planning meeting is held
Admin	Indirect office based tasks	¼ hr			
Team manager	Indirect office based tasks	2 hrs		PLUS 2 hrs Disabilities service manager negotiating joint funding of placement for CWD	
Fostering team social worker	Placement finding activities	6 hrs	MINUS 6hrs – no fostering team activity to support residential placements or placements with own parents PLUS 12 hrs to find a placement with agency foster carers	PLUS 18hrs to find a placement with agency foster carers for a difficult to place child	PLUS 2hrs if a placement planning meeting is held (local authority foster care and kinship placements ONLY)
Fostering team manager			PLUS 1 hr for a placement with agency foster carers		
Other personnel within social services			PLUS ½ hr service manager for agreement to fund an agency placement	PLUS 2 hrs negotiating placement provision and/or joint funding for children with disabilities	PLUS ½ hr Head of Children's Services for agreement for funding of agency placements

Additional Notes:

1. This process does not include the activity to complete a core assessment. The cost of completing a core assessment was calculated by Cleaver, Walker and Meadows as part of one of the other studies in the Costs and Effectiveness research initiative'. The cost to social services to complete a core assessment is £721 (based on 2000/2001 prices).
2. There was variation between the six authorities as to who within the authority agreed to fund an agency placement. You will need to ensure that you calculate the unit cost for the appropriate personnel. Remember to cost all parties involved in this decision making process, for example if the service manager has to discuss the request for funding with the Head of Children's Services you will need to cost both of their time for the relevant discussions.

1 Cleaver, H., Walker, S. and Meadows, P. (2004) Assessing Children's Needs and Circumstances: The Impact of the Assessment Framework, London: Jessica Kingsley.

Process 2 Care planning (inc. care plan, PEP and health assessment)

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Family placement team	Other social services personnel
Visits to family		Fact finding/liasing within social services for care plan					
Travel time for visits		Fact finding/liasing outside social services for care plan					
Telephone calls to family		Completing care plan					
		Obtaining signature for care plan					
Client visits to office		Distribution of care plan					
Other		Fact finding/liasing within social services for PEP					
		Fact finding/liasing outside social services for PEP					
		Completing PEP					
		Distribution of PEP					
		Fact finding/liasing within social services for health assessment					
		Fact finding/liasing outside social services for health assessment					
		Completing health assessment					
		Distribution of health assessment					
		Other					

Process 2 Care planning (including care plan, PEP and health assessment) activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Indirect client related activity for Care Plan and PEP	Care Plan – 1 hr PEP – 2½ hrs Health assessment – 1 hr		MINUS 2½ hrs for children with disabilities – PEPs not completed for these children (Duplication of education assessment for SEN)	
Admin	Indirect client related activity	PEP – ¼ hr Health Assessment – ½ hr			
Fostering team social worker	Care Plan	1¼ hrs			
Fostering team admin	PEP write up	1 hr			
Other personnel within social services	Indirect client related activity	Health assessment – 1 hr (LAC nurse)		PLUS 1hr Care Plan PLUS 2½ hrs PEP PLUS 1hr health assessment (UASC – involvement of translator/interpreter)	

Additional Notes:

1. To explore how costs accrue over time you will need information about the frequency that care plans, PEPs and health assessments are updated. If these dates are not readily available you might want to use the same timeframes as the research team:
 - a. Care Plans – updated after every review, apart from children with disabilities whose care plans are updated annually
 - b. PEPs – updated alongside the care plan
 - c. Health assessments – updated six monthly for children under the age of five and annually for all other children

Process 3 Maintaining the placement

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Family placement team	Other social services personnel
Visits to family		Liaising within social services					
Travel time for visits		Liaising outside social services					
Arranging contact with family		Letters					
Supervising Contact		Case records					
Telephone calls to family		Report of statutory visit					
Arranging statutory visits		Action resulting from statutory visit					
Travel to statutory visits		Ongoing placement support (i.e. supporting foster carers)					
Statutory Visit		Other					
Phone calls to young person							
Client visits to office							
Other							

Process 3 Maintaining the placement activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Direct client related contact (including statutory visits) and indirect office based tasks	6 hrs (direct work) 2½ hrs (office based tasks)	PLUS 4 hrs per month during the first three months of a new placement (for additional visits to child) PLUS 8 hrs children placed out of authority (increased travelling time)	PLUS 8 hrs for children with care orders for facilitating and supervising contact	
Admin	Indirect office based tasks	30¼ hrs			
Fostering team social worker	Ongoing support of foster carers/ placement	15¼ hrs	MINUS 15¼ HRS – no fostering team activity to support residential placements or placements with own parents PLUS 7 hrs for local authority foster care during the first month of a new placement (extra support for the foster carers) PLUS 2½ hrs for kinship placements (higher level of support) MINUS 11¼ hrs for local authority foster care placements lasting for longer than one year (reduced level of support)		
Other personnel within social services	Indirect client related activity			PLUS 8½ hrs UASC – involvement of translator/interpreter	

Additional Notes:

1. The activity figures shown above are all per month, to calculate costs over a longer period of time, for example the length of a placement or a financial year it would be necessary to multiply the monthly unit cost of this process by the required time frame

Process 4 Ceased being looked after

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Family placement team	Other social services personnel
Information gathering from family for return home		Assessment of needs Using assessment framework					
Travel time for information gathering		Written report for child to return home					
Return child/young person home		Decision from director of social services or representative for the child to return home					
Travel time to return child/young person home		Inform relevant parties					
		Other					
Other							

Process 4 Cease being looked after activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Direct client related contact and indirect office based tasks	10½ hrs			
Admin	Indirect office based tasks	¾ hr			

Additional Notes:

1. The workers who provided the activity figures did not identify any variations in activity for this process.

Process 5 Find subsequent placement

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Family placement team	Other social services personnel
Visits to family		Fact finding/liasing within social services					
Travel time for visits		Fact finding/liasing outside social services					
Telephone calls to family		Visits/discussions with carers/potential placement					
Client visits to office		Before planning meeting Organisation/room booking					
Introduction to placement		During planning meeting Who goes?					
		How long?					
Other		Where held?					
		Travel					
		Waiting time					
		After planning meeting Minutes/reports					
		Letters					
		Form filling					
		Placement plan 1					
		Placement plan 2					
		Case records					
		Other					

Process 5 Find a subsequent placement activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Direct client related contact and indirect office based tasks Placement Planning meeting activity includes the write up	3 hrs	PLUS 8hrs for a residential placement – (completion of an assessment of child's needs for the placement) PLUS 8hrs to find a residential placement PLUS 8hrs to place a child in an out of authority placement	PLUS 24 hrs to find a residential placement for a difficult to place child PLUS 31 hours to find an appropriate placement for CWD	PLUS 2hrs if a placement planning meeting is held
Admin	Indirect office based tasks	½ hr			
Team manager	Indirect office based tasks			PLUS 2 hrs disabilities service manager negotiating joint funding of placement for CWD	
Fostering team social worker	Placement finding activities	3 hrs	MINUS 3 hrs – no fostering team activity to support residential placements or placements with own parents PLUS 12 hrs to find a placement with agency foster carers	PLUS 18hrs to find a placement with agency foster carers for a difficult to place child	PLUS 2hrs if a placement planning meeting is held (local authority foster care and kinship placements ONLY)
Fostering team manager	Obtain funding for agency foster care placements		PLUS 1hr to obtain agreement to fund a placement with agency foster carers		
Other personnel within social services	Indirect office based tasks		PLUS ½ hr service manager for agreement to fund an agency placement	PLUS 2 hrs disabilities service manager negotiating joint funding of placement for CWD PLUS 3 hrs UASC involvement of translator/interpreter	PLUS ½ hr head of children's services for agreement for funding of agency placements

Additional Notes:

- 1 There was variation between the six authorities as to who within the authority agreed to fund an agency placement. You will need to ensure that you calculate the unit cost for the appropriate personnel. Remember to cost all parties involved in this decision making process, for example if the service manager has to discuss the request for funding with the head of children's services you will need to cost both of their time for the relevant discussions.

Process 6 Review

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Family placement team	Other social services personnel
Consultation with young person prior to the review		Fact finding/liasing within social services					
Consultation with parents prior to the review		Fact finding/liasing outside social services					
Consultation with carer prior to the review		Before review Organisation/ room booking					
Other		Completion of social worker report for the review					
		During review Who goes?					
		How long?					
		Where held?					
		Travel					
		After review Completion of review discussion and decisions					
		Distribution of review form					
		Actions resulting from review					
		Case records					
		Other					

Process 6 Review
activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Including activity to prepare for the review; the meeting and any actions resulting from the meeting	5½ hrs		PLUS ½ hr for children allocated to the Leaving Care Team – longer statutory visit prior to review meetings PLUS 5¼ hrs for first Leaving Care review – attendance by both field and leaving care s/w/s PLUS 1hr for UASC – longer review meetings to allow time for interpretation	
Admin	Indirect office based tasks	1 hr			
Team manager	Indirect office based tasks	1½ hrs			
Fostering team social worker	Attendance at review and travelling time	2 hrs			
Independent reviewing officer	Preparation for review; attendance at review meeting and completion of paperwork	5¼ hrs		PLUS 1hr for UASC – longer review meetings to allow time for interpretation	
Other personnel within social services				PLUS 6¼ hrs for UASC – involvement of translator/interpreter	

Additional Notes:

1. There is an additional ½ of social work activity for an initial review meeting (first review after the child becomes looked after)
2. As with process two (care planning), to explore how costs accrue over time you will need information about the frequency that review meetings are carried out. If these dates are not readily available you might want to use the statutory timeframes, i.e. 28 days, three monthly and six monthly. Workers from five of the six authorities participating in the research also stated that reviews were held more frequently for placements out of the area of the authority (3 monthly rather than 6 monthly) and in all authorities reviews were held 3 monthly for children placed with their own parents with a care order.

Process 7 Legal

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Legal adviser	Other social services personnel
Visits to family		Before court proceedings Read past volumes of case file and make notes					
Travel time for visits		Complete a chronology					
Telephone calls to family		Develop a personal timetable to run alongside court timetable					
Other		Prepare statement for court					
		Care plan					
		Develop a court timetable					
		Consultation between social worker and legal advisor					
		Preparation to give oral evidence in court					
		During court proceedings Who goes?					
		How long?					
		Travel					
		Waiting time					
		Activity resulting from court proceedings Inform relevant parties of outcome					
		Other					

Process 7 Legal activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Direct client related activity	14½ hrs			
	Indirect office based tasks and time in Court	64 hrs			
Admin	Indirect office based tasks	1 hr			
Team manager	Indirect office based tasks and time in Court	24½ hrs			
Legal advisor					

Additional Notes:

1. The activity figures shown above are to obtain a care order for an uncontested case for a single child.

Process 8 Transition to leaving care services

Direct client related contact	Social worker	Indirect client related activity	Social worker	Admin	Team manager	Family placement team	Other social services personnel
Visits to young person		Referral of young person to leaving care team					
Travel time for visits		Undertake a multi-agency assessment					
Telephone calls to family		Development of a pathway plan					
Client visits to office		Writing of pathway plan					
Other		Distribution of pathway plan to relevant parties					
		Appointment of a personal advisor					
		Other					

Process 8 Transition to leaving care team activity figures (Average level of activity based on figures provided by six local authorities)

Who	Type of activity	Total time	Placement type variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Child variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)	Authority variations (these figures are all in addition to those given in the total time column)
Field social worker	Completion of needs assessment and transfer of case to leaving care team	9 hrs			
Leaving care social worker	Completion of pathway plan including discussion with field social worker	39 hrs			
Admin	Indirect office based tasks	1 hr			

Additional Notes:

1. In the six participating authorities this process did not occur for children with disabilities or UASC who continued to be allocated to specialist teams until they were eighteen. For all other young people the transition to the leaving care team occurred either when they were fifteen and a half or around their sixteenth birthday.

4

What is the Cost Calculator?

The Cost Calculator is a computer application designed to help local authorities cost services provided for looked after children.

Why use it?

The model can assist local authorities with strategic planning and the commissioning of services for looked after children.

How does it work?

The Cost Calculator has three functions:

- 1) It is a tool that collates key descriptive information held by a local authority on its looked after population and relates this to activities which incur costs.
- 2) It is a calculator that uses data on children's characteristics and unit costs of social work processes as a basis for working out the sequential costs of placements and care episodes for both individuals and for groups of children. The calculations take into account the numerous variations in costs engendered by differences in children's needs, placement types and local authority procedures.
- 3) It has an analytic function that allows the user to compare the costs for groups of children with different needs over different periods of time and to gain a better understanding of why certain children cost more than others. One of the strengths of the Cost Calculator is its use of longitudinal rather than snapshot data, this means that the user can explore how costs accrue over time.

Development of unit costs

The unit cost spreadsheet of the Cost Calculator contains all of the standard process costs, it also contains all of the placement, child and authority variations identified in the research.

Customising the Cost Calculator

Wherever possible the model uses identical terminology to the SSDA 903 returns, the Children in Need census or the Integrated Children's System Placement Information Record. The data are therefore likely to be held electronically in most authorities and be suitable for use in the Cost Calculator without modification (see the table on page 36 for details of the child and placement data required by the model).

Furthermore, the customisable version of the Cost Calculator allows local authorities to use their own unit costs for each of the processes referred to throughout this pack, these figures are just entered into the unit cost spreadsheet and the Cost Calculator will use these figures to carry out all the cost calculations.

Problematic variables

Whilst most of the data items required by the Cost Calculator can be extracted from management information systems a couple of problematic variables were identified. As outlined in Part 3 of this pack some local authorities do not always have clear criteria or definitions for identifying children with disabilities or those with emotional or behavioural difficulties. We would therefore advise local authorities to develop clear definitions in order to maximise the benefits of using the Cost Calculator (the definitions used by the research team are outlined on page 17).

The pilot phase

The Cost Calculator was initially developed in a university setting and has recently been piloted in a local authority. The aim of this phase was to get the model up and running in a local authority setting and develop the necessary links with the management information system.

This work has been undertaken in close consultation with the pilot authority to ensure that elements that will be most useful for planning and commissioning strategies can be integrated into the Cost Calculator.

Cost Calculator developments following the pilot phase

During the pilot phase it was possible to update some of the cost calculations carried out for the initial research study. Fundamentally improvements in management information systems and an increase in the amount of child and placement data routinely collected resulted in improved cost estimates. For example, it was possible to link actual placement fees with individual children (previously averages of placement fees had to be used).

Following the completion of the pilot phase the Cost Calculator also now includes an 'inflator' facility to allow salaries and allowances/fees to be inflated. The user can now explore alternative scenarios, for example changes to costs if different placement types are utilised. The user can also explore the impact on costs if additional support services are put in place alongside placements.

Furthermore, as improved cost estimates become available, it will be possible for these to be incorporated into the Cost Calculator to provide more accurate cost calculations.

Child and placement data required by the cost calculator

Variable
Numerical identifier for each child
Date of birth
Gender
Whether the child has disabilities*
Whether the child has emotional or behavioural difficulties*
Whether the child receives mental health support
Whether the child is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child
Numerical code for the child's legal status
Whether the child has committed a criminal offence
Whether the child has support from the Youth Offending Team (YOT)
If so, the start date(s) for YOT support provision
If YOT support has been provided, the date(s) on which it ends
Care episode start date
Placement start date**
Placement end date**
Numerical code for the type of placement**
Whether the placement is provided by the local authority**
Whether the placement is within the area of the local authority**
Whether the placement includes an education provision**
Whether the placement includes health facilities**
Whether the child has left care at the end of the placement**
Dates of review meetings
Dates of care plan updates

* These two variables were identified as being poorly defined (see page 17 for more details).

**This information is required for every placement

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

Full research report

Ward, H., Holmes, L., Soper, J. and Olsen, R. (2004) Costs and Consequences of Different Types of Child Care Provision, Loughborough: Loughborough University, Centre for Child and Family Research.

Copies of the Cost Calculator

A demonstration version of the Cost Calculator, along with a user guide will be distributed to all local authorities in England and Wales in winter 2005. Licensed, customisable versions will then be made available to authorities later in winter 2005. To find out more please email costcalculator@lboro.ac.uk

Information about the Costs and Effectiveness Research Initiative can be found at:

www.york.ac.uk/res/cescin/welcome.htm

For further information about the Costs and Consequences study please contact:

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www.ccf.org.uk

For further information about Choice Protects please contact:

Foster Care and Choice Protects Team
Department for Education and Skills
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Tothill Street
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SW1H 9NA
0870 0012345
choice.protects@dfes.gsi.gov.uk
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/fostercare
<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/planningandcommissioning>

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