

SCRUTINY REPORT

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES
SCRUTINY PANEL**

14th September 2020

Sufficiency and Permanence: Perceptions of Children in Care

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1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set the scene for a case study, presented by Directors and Heads of Service in Children's Services. It will focus on children's journeys from coming to the attention of the MACH (Multi-Agency Children's Hub), the front door to Children's Services, to becoming a Care Leaver.
- 1.2 Throughout the presentation there will be references to children achieving permanence - moving to their 'forever homes', to the sufficiency of placements - both the number and type of placements for children in our care and the work taking place to improve practice in both areas.
- 1.3 The family in the case study is fictitious. The issues do not present a rounded view of a family and can be seen as stereotypical but are presented in this way to promote discussion.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Permanency

Permanence for children can be achieved in a number of ways.

- **Adoption:** A court order. Parental responsibility is removed from birth parents and transferred to the adoptive parents.
- **Special Guardianship Order:** A court order. Birth parents share parental responsibility with a Special Guardian. The Special Guardian's parental responsibility carries greater weight than that of the birth parents.
- **Child Arrangement Order:** An order that states where a child will live, spend time with or have contact with. The decisions are made in the best interests of each individual child.
- **Long term fostering:** A child is placed permanently with foster carers. Invariably the child is subject to a Care Order. The birth parents retain parental responsibility along with the local authority. The local authority's parental

responsibility carries greater weight than that of the birth parents. The foster carers do not have parental responsibility.

- **Long term Residential:** A young person is placed permanent in a children's home. The young person may be subject to a care order as above or 'section 20' where the birth parents have parental responsibility but the local authority does not.
- **Returning Home/Staying Home:** A child or young person returns home where it is safe to do so or is able to stay home with birth parents.

2.2 Ofsted's report following our inspection in Nov/Dec 2019 stated:-

'Early permanence is not prioritised for children in Middlesbrough and there is a lack of parallel planning which creates delay in achieving stability'. (Para 15).

'The lack of parallel planning creates delay for most children in achieving permanence'. (Para 14)

Delays in achieving permanence are not sufficiently challenged by Independent Reviewing Officers' (Para 19)

'Some children, including very young children, have experienced too many changes in placement before their permanent placement is identified. (Para 23)

Children experience significant delay in securing permanence through adoption. Currently there are not enough adopters for children who are waiting' (Para 25)

2.3 Sufficiency of Placements

Also from the Ofsted report.

'The large number of older children and adolescents in care has reduced placement choice. (Para 14)

The Ofsted report can be found at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80523>

The issue relating to placement sufficiency is whether or not we have enough placements or access to enough placements to meet the individual needs of the children and young people in Middlesbrough's care and if not what are we doing to meet their needs.

2.4 Improvement Work

Both Middlesbrough's Permanence and Sufficiency Strategies are being reviewed and revised. They will sit under an overarching Corporate Parenting Strategy and be informed by the voice and views of children and young people. This is a pertinent reminder that the children experiencing delay and an insufficient number and type of placement are 'our' children as we are all their Corporate Parents.

'The core purpose of our permanency practice is to 'ensure that all children and young people in our care are growing up in stable, secure, safe and nurturing living arrangements, and are supported in a positive transition to independence

and adult life. This is reflected in our social work practice, and in our systems, processes and partnerships for permanency. The provocations (strong prompts) from our Futures for Families programme provide a critical reference point for us as we strive to improve the quality and impact of our permanence arrangements for children and young people in Middlesbrough'. (Draft strategy 2020)

The progressive increase in the proportionate balance of spend on our support for children in care, and the increasing proportion of children presenting with acute and complex needs illustrates the scale of our challenges as we forecast and plan forward. To meet this business-critical challenge we have a clear three-pronged approach: To improve our social work and permanency practice; To strengthen the coherence and impact of our sufficiency and commissioning arrangements and to progressively rebalance our resources towards prevention and support for children and young people on the edge of care. (Draft Strategy 2020)

The scale of the challenge in Middlesbrough is unprecedented as we currently have around 690 children in our care.

3.0 DISCUSSION/EVIDENCE

3.1 Discussion - Case Study

The Green family live in the Newport area of Middlesbrough. The family composition is as follows:-

Name	Relationship	Age	Comments
Sarah Green	Mother	35	
John Green	Partner	30	Father of B and C
Adrian Smith	Son	14	
Bella Green	Daughter	6	
Carmen Green	Daughter	6 months	

- Sarah has suffered from postnatal depression since Carmen's birth.
- John is facing redundancy from his low paid role due to the economic effects of COVID.
- Adrian has limited contact with his birth father which he enjoys. His attendance at school was around 54% before lockdown and he goes missing overnight on a regular basis
- Bella is has a disability exacerbated by living in damp accommodation. She is pleased to be back at school following lockdown.
- Carmen is a delightful, gorgeous little one but she doesn't always sleep well at night.

3.2 Heads of Service and Directors will talk to the children's journeys in line with their areas of responsibility.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The aim is that this interactive session will allow Members of the Scrutiny Panel to gain a greater insight into children's journey's with particular regard to children

becoming looked after and achieving permanence. Comments on the format of the meeting will be welcomed.