

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

<b>Date:</b> Monday 18th January, 2021
<b>Time:</b> 4.00 pm
<b>Venue:</b> Virtual Meeting

### AGENDA

Please note: this is a virtual meeting.
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The meeting will be live-streamed via the Council's <a href="#">Youtube channel</a> at 4.00 pm on Monday 18th January, 2021
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1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Children & Young People's Social Care & Services Scrutiny Panel held on 7 December 2020 3 - 10
4. Sufficiency and Permanency (Perceptions of Children in Care) - Further Information 11 - 22  
  
The Executive Director of Children's Services and Head of Service for Future for Families will be in attendance to present the Panel with information relating to foster carers, including recruitment and retention initiatives.
5. Sufficiency and Permanency (Perceptions of Children in Care) - Further Information - Corporate Parenting Strategy 23 - 82

The Executive Director of Children's Services and the Children's Services Programme Manager will be in attendance to present an overview of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

6. Covid Recovery - Children's Services

The Executive Director of Children's Services will provide a verbal update on Covid Recovery in Children's Services.

7. Overview and Scrutiny Board Update

The Chair will provide a verbal update on business conducted at the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 18 December 2020 and 14 January 2021.

8. Date and Time of Next Meeting - 15 February 2021 at 4.00pm

9. Any other urgent items which in the opinion of the Chair, may be considered.

Charlotte Benjamin  
Director of Legal and Governance Services

Town Hall  
Middlesbrough  
Tuesday 12 January 2021

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors L Garvey (Chair), C Dodds (Vice-Chair), C Cooke, T Higgins, S Hill, M Saunders, Z Uddin, J Walker and G Wilson

**Assistance in accessing information**

**Should you have any queries on accessing the Agenda and associated information please contact Joanne Dixon, 01642 729713, joanne\_dixon@middlesbrough.gov.uk**

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

**A meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 7 December 2020.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Garvey (Chair), Councillor Dodds (Vice Chair); Councillors: Cooke, Cooper (substitute for Councillor Hill), Higgins, Uddin, J Walker and Wilson.

**OFFICERS:** C Breheny, S Butcher, J Dixon, R Farnham, R Hamer, P Jemson and G Moore.

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor Hellaoui – Chair of Corporate Parenting Board.

**PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER:** A Baxter – LGA.

**APOLOGIES** for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Saunders and Councillor High (Lead Member for Children's Social Care).

### **\*\* DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 9 November 2020 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Higgins who had joined as a Member of the Panel, replacing Councillor Wright.

### **SUFFICIENCY AND PERMANENCY (PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN IN CARE) – FURTHER INFORMATION**

S Butcher, Executive Director of Children's Services, R Farnham, Director of Children's Care, P Jemson, Head of Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting, and R Hamer, Service Manager for Futures for Families, were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with information in relation to its current scrutiny topic, with particular focus on Futures for Families and the Innovate Team.

The presentation began with an overview of the children looked after cohort up to 31 October and their journey over the past 12 months.

296 children had a new episode of becoming looked after during this period. Some children might have come in and out of care more than once. 10% (29) of the cohort became looked after for a second time or more. 67% of those children were subject to a Child Protection Plan prior to coming into care. This meant that 33% became looked after having no previous child protection involvement.

44.9% had multiple referrals prior to them becoming looked after – "start again syndrome" where children are referred in, then the case was closed once the parenting/home situation improved to an acceptable standard. Once social work involvement ceased, standards could deteriorate again resulting in repeated referrals and assessments.

34% had Early Help intervention prior to becoming looked after. That means 65% had no Early Help intervention.

18% (53) who became looked after in last 12 months were no longer in the local authority's care. 28.3% moved on to a Special Guardianship Order; 32% exited on a child arrangement order; 19% were planned or unplanned moves home with parents or person with parental responsibility and

1.9% stopped being 'looked after' as they reached the age of 18 – although work was continued with care leavers.

82% (243) of children who became looked after in the last 12 months (of the 293) remained in the authority's care. Of those 243 children, 75% remained in short term foster care. 0.4% were in long term foster care. 17% were placed with parents/persons with PR on a care order. 5.8% were placed in residential homes, supported accommodation or hostels.

### Futures for Families

R Hamer, Service Manager, Futures for Families, was in attendance to inform the Panel about Futures for Families and progress to date.

The Panel was informed that Futures for Families 'went live' in September 2020. During September, Futures for Families provided edge of care support to 14 young people in fragile placements and provided in-reach support from the hub to three young people. In October the number of young people in fragile placements supported by Futures for Families increased to 38 and the hub provided in-reach support to four young people. In November, 39 fragile placements were supported and five young people were provided with in-reach support by the hub.

In response to a query, it was clarified that a 'fragile' placement was a difficult placement where the child/young person and/or foster carers were struggling and the placement was at risk of breaking down. Futures for Families was able to offer respite or planned work with the life coach and to offer various means of support to help prevent placement breakdowns. In addition, where families were edging towards care, Futures for Families could offer the family respite in the hub. This support was not previously available.

It was noted that there had been an increase in the numbers of young people supported by Futures for Families in October and November and this was probably due to raising awareness of the support available across Children's Services.

Since the presentation was written, a further three young people were about to start receiving in-reach support in the hub, two to three days per week. Those that had been supported in crisis, no longer required support and Futures for Families had stepped away. Where young people were being supported in a regular placement, Futures for Families had been able to support them to enable them to remain in the placement.

The impact of Futures for Families in the short time it had been operating had been analysed by the Innovate Team and North Yorkshire Council. They had looked at 40 young people's care experiences and the outcomes had been shared with Social Work Teams and Principal Social Workers to improve practice. It was identified that one area where young people struggled was with the transition from primary to secondary school and this had caused placements and home lives to breakdown. So instead of providing support to 12-25 year old age range, Future for Families provided support from age 11-25 so that they could provide support to young people during that transition.

75% of all young people accessing Futures for Families were receiving support from the Life Coach. This support was either direct (face to face therapeutic sessions) or indirect (where the Life Coach provided strategies to the people working with the young person). Of those accessing such support, 92% had no previously identified need.

Previously, 32.5% of young people had an undiagnosed speech and language difficulty. Of those, 92% were male. Following research by Durham and North Yorkshire Councils, it was expected that the 32.5% figure would increase to more than 50% as the Communication Support Worker worked with more young people. Support was introduced gradually in order to build a solid foundation to help each young person and their specific needs.

A graph was shown detailing the total number of hours direct support that had been provided in



September – 99 hours; October - 151; and November – 177. Whilst the number of direct support hours provided had increased month on month, it was acknowledged that Covid had affected the work being undertaken. Young people self-isolating from school were unable to visit the hub and staff had been deployed to try to give support where it was most needed. Due to covid restrictions young people could only be worked with for a short time in the family home, so visits were shorter than they would normally be.

Data on activity for each intervention type was provided. Building relationships and emotional and mental health were the highest support provision. Provision of activities was much lower than it would normally be due to covid restrictions.

Members were informed that, during the past 12 months, 11 young people had a total of 94 missing episodes. Due to targeted outreach work, all of those young people had seen a reduction of between 50 and 100% in missing episodes. Of those young people, 36% had not experienced any further missing episodes since receiving support from Futures for Families.

Futures for Families was supporting nine young people to return to their families or a connected persons/foster placement from expensive residential placements.

A Member of the Panel asked how those missing children were monitored and how Futures for Families were made aware that the young person was missing and how they helped to stop them going missing in the future. The Service Manager advised that a Police Data Analyst and Intervention Officer were part of the team that built up relationships to understand why young people went missing and they worked closely with Social Care colleagues and there had been a reduction in missing episodes. In addition, multi-agency RAISE meetings were held for young people where there were significant concerns.

#### Innovate – Commissioned Service

The Director of Children's Services advised the Panel that following examination of Middlesbrough's placement data and as part of the strategy to improve permanence and to address the concerns of Ofsted in its last inspection, Children's Services commissioned the Innovate Team in July 2020.

The placement data showed that:-

- Long term permanence for children was not achieved quickly enough. This undermined their ability to create attachments, feel secure and support their emotional wellbeing.
- Too many children were placed on a Care Order (meaning they were officially looked after) but remained at home with parents.
- There were currently too many children in residential placements and not enough children in placements with Middlesbrough Council employed foster carers.
- There were not enough Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) as a plan of permanence despite a high proportion of children being placed with connected persons carers (family and friends/kinship care). SGOs were permanent plans for looked after children enabling them to remain with family members/friends and the local authority then discharged the child from being looked after. During 2020/21 there was a reduction in the number of SGOs from 10 in quarter 1, to eight in quarter 2.
- Given the numbers and age demographic of Middlesbrough's children looked after population, not enough children were being adopted in a timely way. Whilst covid had impacted on this more recently, it was an issue previously.

The Innovate Team was a commissioned Team of Social Workers to progress 90 children subject to Care Orders. The aim of the intervention was to provide permanence; placement stability; support children out of residential placements back into family life – improving outcomes for children

and reducing the numbers of children looked after in Middlesbrough.

The Team had been working with four key cohorts:-

- Children in residential placements.
- Children placed with parents where the discharge of a Care Order was required.
- Children living with a Connected Persons Foster Carer where the plan was to progress to a Special Guardianship Order.
- Children living with a Foster Carer where support was needed to prevent the placement breaking down and a future move.

The impact of the work undertaken to date by the Innovate Team was summarised as follows:-

- 19 children in external residential placements had been worked with. This included a full review of assessments and care plans. It was concluded that 17 of those were assessed as suitable to be moved.
  - 3 were moved to foster care placements.
  - 3 were rehabilitated back home.
  - All 6 had been moved closer to Middlesbrough.
  - 3 had moving dates scheduled.
  - The remaining 8 were expected to move by the end of 2020.
- The remaining two children in external residential placements were currently in their final year of secondary school and it was considered not to be appropriate to move them at this point whilst they were in their GCSE year.
- There had been a significant cost benefit in moving the young people from external residential placements as well as securing better outcomes for them. Cost reductions of approximately £797,000 for the full year based on four young people being moved had been identified.
- Of the 90 children worked with, 10 were subject to Care Orders whilst placed at home with parents. All 10 were progressing through the Courts. Since the report was written, three children had now had their Care Orders revoked and the remaining seven were expected to be revoked by the end of the year. The children were appropriately placed with parents and had ceased to be looked after.
- In terms of cost benefits, it was noted that reductions in the length of time spent in care resulted in a weekly cost avoidance of approximately £323 per child.
- Of the 90 children worked with, 45 were placed in Connected Persons Foster Care placements. Of those 45 children:-
  - Three had been placed back home and six were in the process of being rehabilitated back home due to sustained changes made by parents.
  - 22 children were actively moving down the Special Guardianship Order pathway, with Court dates for some having been set.
  - 14 children were subject to further negotiations and planning with possible guardians, with nearly all expected to go ahead.
  - In terms of cost benefits, it was noted that reductions in the length of time spent in care resulted in a weekly cost avoidance of approximately £189 per child.
- Intensive intervention had been undertaken with 16 children in fragile placements where a breakdown would have resulted in a further move or an escalation to residential care. All 16 were being successfully maintained in their current placements.
- Preventing a move to residential care resulted in a cost avoidance of approximately £2,881 per child.

The Panel was provided with two case studies showing the work that had been undertaken by the Innovate Team and how some of this work dove-tailed with Futures for Families.

Possible 'green shoots', made following the last Ofsted inspection due to the work of Innovate and Futures for Families had been identified.

### Connected Persons Carers

30% of Middlesbrough's children looked after were placed in a connected carer placement (family members or friends and the child subject of a Care Order). This was the most prevalent placement type.

In the last 12 months, 167 children ceased to be looked after and almost half of those exited a connected care placement. This meant that Children's Services was better at moving children into permanence via a Special Guardianship Order or back home than from any other placement type.

In the last three months, more connected carer placements had ceased (33) than had started (31). Forecasting based on a three month average showed a decline in the use of connected carer placements. This was partly due to improved throughput of children in care case work and a shift in care planning as greater exploration of placements that best suited the child's needs was being undertaken. Progress was being made but this was still an area that required improvement.

### Placement with Parent

It was explained that the term 'Placement with Parent' was used when a child was subject to a Care Order (looked after by the local authority) but lived with a parent. Such placements should be short term, temporary arrangements.

The Panel was informed that the number of placements with parents was much higher in Middlesbrough than all comparators and this was partly due to a legacy of poor practice resulting in the Courts not having sufficient confidence in the quality of social work practice and, therefore, ordering Care Orders to support additional oversight. It was highlighted, however, that audits suggested that Care Orders had not improved social care oversight of the case – ie, social workers had not worked effectively on the case resulting in families remaining on Care Orders for long periods of time. In such cases, either the Care Order should have been discharged much earlier or, in some cases, the child had been left in a neglectful situation for too long resulting in being taken into care. It was acknowledged that relationships between Children's Services and the Courts were being strengthened.

It was reported that as of the end of October, 87 children were in placements with parents. This figure had increased by 20% in the last 12 months; 13% in the last six months and 1% in the last three months. These children spent an average of 16 months in their placement with parents. 36 of those children were placed with parents for longer than one year; 21 were placed for more than two years; and 10 were placed for more than three years.

The most recent data showed that, over the last three months, for the first time ever, more children ceased to be looked after in placements with parents than those that started being looked after in this placement type. In the last three months, there had been 12 new placement with parent arrangements and 16 children had ceased to be looked after under this type of arrangement.

### External Residential and Fostering Placements

The Panel was informed that there were currently 177 in-house placements due to a concerted effort to make best use of all available capacity in the system. This had included a recruitment drive, the broadening of approval criteria and strengthening of foster care management. It was highlighted that exemptions could be used on a short term basis, for example, where a foster carer's registration category was to care for one child aged 5-10 years, if it was deemed to be a suitable placement they may be asked if they would consider caring for a four year old or an 11

year old, or to care for two siblings, etc. It was about using resources wisely.

There were currently 154 Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements in use and it was noted that, in the last six months, there had been a reduction in the use of IFA placements by 4%. In addition, there had been an increase in the use of in-house placements by 14% compared to the same period last year. This enabled Social Workers to maintain children in local foster care placements and to reduce the cost of external placements. The work being undertaken by Futures for Families and Innovate to support fragile placements was starting to have a positive impact. Of the 16 children currently being supported from within the Innovate Team, all had maintained their current placements.

Data forecasts were provided based on trends over the past three, six, 12, 24 and 36 months in relation to use of connected carer placements, placement with parent and external residential and fostering placements. Each showed a significant positive impact if the current three month average trend continued.

It was highlighted that a Permanence Monitoring Group, chaired by the Head of Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting, had been embedded into practice. Social Workers and Team Managers looked at cases to ensure they had been actioned appropriately and that children received permanency in a timely way.

Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions and the following issues were raised:-

- A Panel Member noted that one external placement of a young person had been in Scotland and sought clarification as to how this placement was managed due to differences in English and Scottish laws/regulations. The Director of Children's Care responded that the young person had been placed there due to availability of placements at the time. Childcare legislation differed in Scotland and the authority had to instruct a barrister to make the application for the necessary changes for a Scottish home to care for the young person. This was necessary to bridge the differences in legislation. It was highlighted that this young person was now placed back in the local area. It was highlighted that performance data showed 82% of children looked after were placed within a 20 mile radius of Middlesbrough and only 18% were living more than 20 miles away.
- A Member queried how many referrals, on average, were made in relation to a child before they were taken into care. The Executive Director stated that the information could be compiled and circulated to the Panel.
- In response to a query, it was confirmed that the Innovate Team consisted of a Team Manager and five Social Workers and that there were currently 211 children placed with Connected Persons Carers (there were not 211 Connected Persons Carers however as some of those children were placed in sibling groups).
- With reference to the number of children currently looked after, it was queried whether further details could be provided of the locations of the placements. The Director of Children's Care agreed to provide this information to the Panel.
- Further explanation was sought in relation to the number of children (67% of 296 children) that had been subject to a child protection plan at some point before becoming looked after. The Director explained that 33% had not been subject to a child protection plan prior to becoming looked after which meant they had not received any intervention prior to coming into care. The figure of 67% should be much higher as this would mean that those children had received some type of preventative work. Lower level intervention via Early Help should be much higher and becoming looked after should be the absolute last resort if a child was not able to live safely with their parents. It should not be that children were taken directly into care without any prior Child Protection intervention. It was highlighted that the number of children becoming looked after had started to reduce.

- A Member asked what the definition of a short term placement was and the maximum length of time a short term placement should be. The Director responded that ideally a short term placement should not exceed six months. It was highlighted that once a child became looked after, a looked after review was held at around four months and at this point a permanency plan should be in progress. The timescale for care proceedings was around 26 weeks. It was acknowledged that whilst the data management system used by Children's Services identified short term and long term placements it did not necessarily correlate the length of time of the placements and this could be taken on board.
- In relation to a question regarding family finding, it was confirmed that assessments were undertaken on any family members that came forward to care for the child. This should not be done in a linear way as it could cause delays in care proceedings. Previous practice had been to sometimes place a child with family in a connected persons placement whilst assessments were undertaken but this had resulted in children remaining in the placement for too long. It was suggested that it may be better to place children with mainstream foster carers whilst family members were assessed to ensure that it was the most appropriate placement for the child.
- A Panel Member made reference to Case Study One within the presentation and queried how long the young person had been in care and for how much longer than required and what quality assurance processes were now in place to ensure this did not happen in the future. The Director advised that the young person in this case had been in a residential placement for three years. Following a review of assessments and care planning, it became clear in July that the young person could return home to the care of mum. In terms of quality assurance processes, the weekly Permanency Monitoring Group was crucial and was reviewing all young people's care plans.
- A Panel Member referred to the Innovate Team as being an externally commissioned service and asked whether Children's Services was confident that the outcomes achieved were in the best interests of the children. The Director responded that Children's Services looked at the quality of the assessments and care plans and provided a lot of audit and oversight to ensure the quality of work was what was required. There were also tight arrangements in place to monitor the contract and outcomes. In addition, Innovate had been used previously and had performed well, achieving what had been asked of them.
- Reference was made to the recruitment and retention of foster carers. It was acknowledged that it could be a very stressful role and it was queried what support and training was offered to nurture those carers and how were their opinions monitored. The Panel was advised that foster carers each had their own Supervising Social Worker that visited once a month, or more often if needed. The Supervising Social Worker was always on hand to provide support and guidance generally and during times of crisis. The Worker also regularly reviewed training needs and worked closely with the Social Worker of any child/children in placement. Out of hours support was also available to carers. A Foster Carers Association had been established for carers to discuss how they were feeling and how improvements could be made. Annual Foster Carer reviews were also held which provided carers with the opportunity to raise any issues they might have. Each foster carer's annual review was submitted to Family Placement Panel and recommendations made by the Panel, for example, changes to registration criteria, etc were considered by the Agency Decision Maker for final approval (or otherwise). It was also highlighted that there would be discussions with the authority's partners in practice in the new year to examine reviewing Middlesbrough's foster carer offer.
- It was queried whether the authority tracked the number of Special Guardianship placements that were ended by the carers. The Director advised that once a Special Guardianship Order had been granted, the local authority would not ordinarily have any long term engagement with the family as the child would be deemed to be safe with their carer. The authority would be aware of how many special guardians came back to the authority for support but did not routinely track this.

- In response to a query regarding contact arrangements for SGO placements, it was explained that when the local authority made an application for a Special Guardianship Order, it was a requirement to have a support plan including support packages and proposed contact plans in order to maintain stability. The authority would always look to family members to support contact if it could be done safely. Professionals involved with the family would generally hold a family group conference to identify a suitable person to supervise the contact. If it was not possible or appropriate for a family member to supervise contact, the local authority would supervise.
- It was queried whether there was a support group for foster carers. The Panel was advised that apart from the support offered by the service, coffee mornings and similar events were organised for carers.
- Reference was made to the statement that Middlesbrough was better at moving children into SGO placements when they were already placed with connected persons carers and it was queried what the reasons for this were. The Director informed that based on the data examined for each cohort of children looked after, it was identified that, in the last 12 months, Children's Services had been better at progressing to SGOs than any other placement type despite issues with delay.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and informative presentation.

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's current scrutiny topic.

#### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

A verbal update was provided in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 20 November and 3 December 2020, namely:-

##### 20 November 2020

Call-In – Future Accommodation.

##### 3 December 2020

- Executive Forward Work Programme.
- Middlesbrough Council's Response to Covid-19 Response – Chief Executive & Director of Public Health.
- Executive Member update – Executive Member for Environment (Councillor McCabe)
- Scrutiny Panel Chairs' Updates.

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted.

#### **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled for Monday, 18 January 2021 at 4.00pm.

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE  
& SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL  
18 JANUARY 2021**

**Fostering Report  
2020/21**





MIDDLESBROUGH  
**CHILDREN**  
MATTER

Middlesbrough  
moving forward



**Our mission is to show  
Middlesbrough children  
that they matter.**



## 1. Number of Carers and Places:

Quarter:	Carers:	Places:
Annual Return – 2019/20	141	267
Quarter 1	149	243
Quarter 2	156	263
Quarter 3		
Quarter 4		

## 2. Number of Carers by Primary Care Type:

Primary Care Type:	2019/20	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Long-Term	21	19	17		
Short-Term	74	85	89		
Fully Approved Connected Persons	27	33	38		
Fostering to Adopt	1	1	1		
Respite	18	11	11		
Total:	141	149	156		

### 3. Number of Carers Approved:

Approved Carers:	2019/20	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Mainstream	22	5	5		
Fully Approved Connected Persons	19	5	7		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>		

## 4. Number of Carers De-Registrations:

De-Registrations	2019/20	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Mainstream	16	2	0		
Fully Approved Connected Persons	8	2	2		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>		

## 8. Placements:

Age Group:	2019/20	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of Children	163	145	174		
Number of vacant places	15	5	15		
Number of not available places	54	55	56		
Number of places used for Respite Care	35	16	16		

## 9a. Number of not available places:

Not available reason:	2019/20	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Carer taking a break/pending resignation	19	20	18		
Needs of child currently in placement	26	26	29		
Only available if sibling group placed	6	6	7		
Used by CYP Staying Put after turning 18	3	3	2		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>56</b>		

## 9b. Number of not available places:

Breakdown of Carers taking a break/pending resignation	Quarter 2
Personal / Health Reasons	7
Pending Resignation	2
Current Investigation – Standards of Care	2
Post Adoption	2
Fully Approved Connected Person's – To be Closed	2
Update Assessment Required	3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>18</b>

## 12. Recruitment:

Recruitment:	2019/20	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Initial Enquiries	123	12	19		



# What's Working Well

- We have devised a more robust initial screening process that encourages greater dialogue with applicants early in the assessment process and we anticipate that this will reduce the number of initial home visits that do not progress to assessment.
- We have developed plans to streamline the initial enquiry process to reduce the time between initial enquiry and home visit.
- A foster carer recruitment campaign is being delivered in December and staff have been encouraged to contribute to the planning and consultation with the marketing team.
- We have recruited a team of Independent Social Workers to complete Form F assessments to ensure that we can meet the demand generated by the recruitment campaign.(recruitment campaign goes live in 01.21
- There has been a reduction in requests for connected carer assessments due to the greater scrutiny on the range of placement options for children.
- We are developing the Supported Lodgings Provision to ensure robust assessments of potential providers are completed and that subsequent supervision and monitoring of providers is in line with the expectations of mainstream foster carers

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# QUESTIONS

**OUR CORPORATE PARENTING  
STRATEGY  
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE  
IN MIDDLESBROUGH**

**Scrutiny Panel Update  
January 2021**



MIDDLESBROUGH  
**CHILDREN**  
M A T T E R

**Our massive thanks to the children and young people from Middlesbrough who have contributed to the preparation of our Corporate Parenting Strategy, supported by our partners The Care Leaders.**

**We are especially grateful to the young people who have contributed some of their experiences, views and ideas in short videos that are included in the live version of this presentation.**

**All of the young people involved have given their positive consent to their stories being shared to support this important piece of work.**



# Welcome ... Some Key Messages

- **Our Corporate Parenting strategy sets out our vision and action for supporting children & young people in our care**
- **Our strategy is one important element of our wider Improvement Plan for our whole-system of support for children and young people in Middlesbrough**
- **We are doing some things well, but we have a lot to do to improve our support for children and young people in our care**
- **Our strategy has been developed during 2020 in consultation with our staff, our members, our partners and young people. All have contributed to ensuring we have a strong and effective strategy in place**
- **Our children and young people are continuing to make a significant contribution to the development of this piece of work**

# This is How Children & Young People Have a Say in Shaping Their Care in Middlesbrough

Thematic Surveys on Specific Topics  
Confidentially through Advocacy and

*and using this information to improve  
people*

# Shape of Our Strategy



# Our Guiding Principles Developed with Children & Young People

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OUR NEEDS & WISHES

OUR FRIENDS & FAMILY

Contact with all the

families

OUR VOICE & INFLUENCE

OUR EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

having a real voice

influence the plans for our care

need

ready, and to make

adult life

OUR HEALTH & WELLBEING



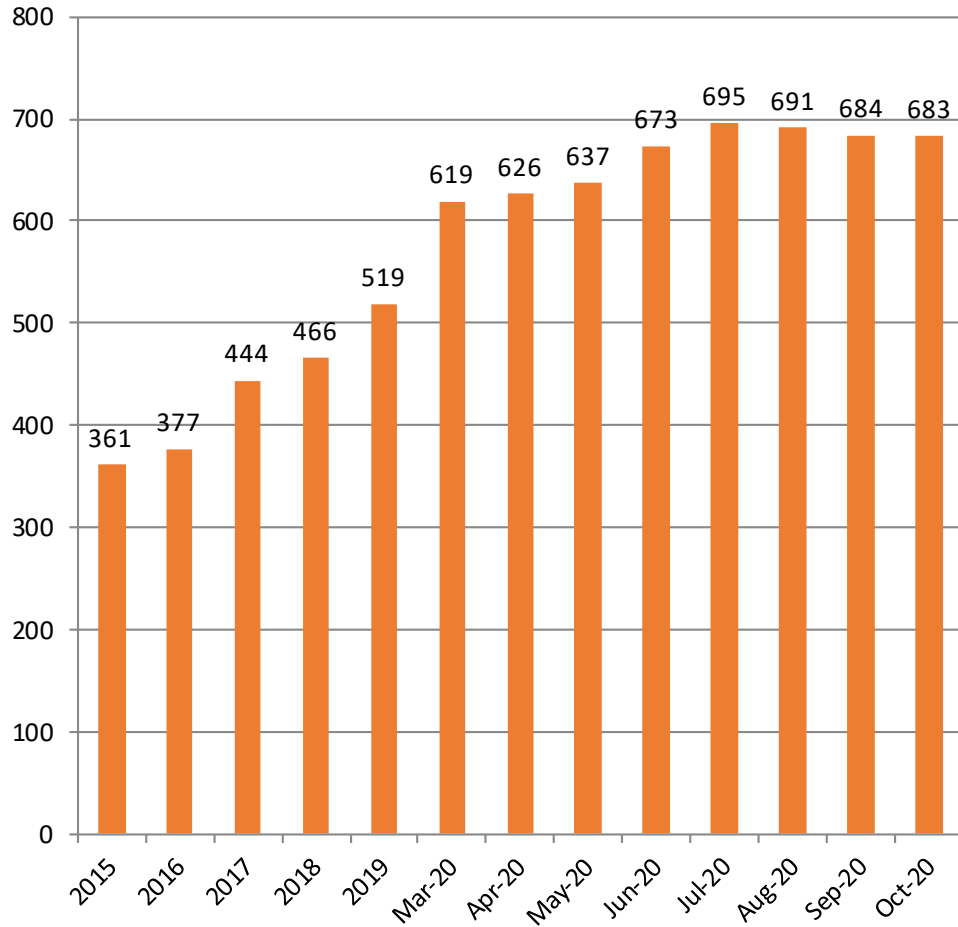


- **Children have more stable placements and there is a steady reduction in the proportion of children who had three or more placement moves in our care**
- **We are reducing drift and delay for children in our care, supported by a targeted focus from our Futures for Families and Innovate projects**
- **More children are supported by us in attending school regularly, and there is a decrease in fixed term exclusions, leading to a more stable and effective learning experience for children**
- **Our visits and contacts with children in our care are increasingly within timescale, leading to an improved experience of care and support**

- **Early identification of risk to support children on the edge of care**
- **Quality and timeliness of our permanence planning**
- **Availability of sufficient and suitable local homes**
- **Access to emotional and mental health support**
- **Educational attainment for children in our care, and Employment and training outcomes for Care Leavers**
- **Robust oversight from Independent Reviewing Officers**
- **Better decision-making on placements & resources**
- **Systematic dental and health checks for children in our care**

# Some Facts About Trends & Demand in Middlesbrough

Number of Children in Care in Middlesbrough, 2015 to October 2020



- **The proportion of children in our care has increased by 89% over the last 5 years - this exceeds national and regional trends**
- **In recent months numbers in our care have started to gradually reduce**
- **There is significant recent improvement in the balance between young people entering and those leaving care**
- **However ... children are still spending too long in our care and we are taking action to improve our permanency practice**
- **As we improve our practice we are reinvesting resources to reduce drift and delay and to support children on the edge of care**

# Our Corporate Parenting Priorities

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**For a full copy of our Corporate Parenting Strategy  
please email  
[karen\\_sproston@Middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:karen_sproston@Middlesbrough.gov.uk)**

Our mission is to show  
Middlesbrough children  
that they matter.



**[middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk](http://middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk)**

Middlesbrough House, Elm Street, Middlesbrough, TS1 2DA  
Tel: 01642 000000 • [info@middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk](mailto:info@middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk)

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A large, stylized heart graphic in the background, composed of overlapping circles in shades of purple, pink, yellow, and blue. Inside the heart, two hands are shown in a supportive grip, one white and one light blue.

**OUR CORPORATE  
PARENTING STRATEGY  
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE  
IN MIDDLESBROUGH**

**2020-2023**



MIDDLESBROUGH  
**CHILDREN**  
MATTER

**Our massive thanks to the children and young people from Middlesbrough who have contributed to the preparation of our Corporate Parenting Strategy, supported by our partners The Care Leaders.**

**We are especially grateful to the young people who have contributed some of their experiences, views and ideas that have directly informed our guiding principles within this strategy.**

**All of the young people involved have given their positive consent to their stories bring shared to support this important**



**[middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk](http://middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk)**

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Tel: 01642 000000 - [info@middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk](mailto:info@middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk)



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33	<b>Part three: Sufficiency</b>
47	<b>Performance Scorecard for Our Corporate Parenting Programme</b>
A Comprehensive Evidence Summary Document of supporting data and information is available separately – please request via email from: <b><a href="mailto:corporateparentconsult@middlesbrough.gov.uk">corporateparentconsult@middlesbrough.gov.uk</a></b>	

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### **An Important Message About Language ...**

*Although much of the legal terminology refers to 'looked after' children, our children and young people in Middlesbrough have made it clear that many of them prefer to be referred to as 'children in care' – so this is the language that we have used throughout our Corporate Parenting strategy*



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## WELCOME TO OUR CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

Welcome to our Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People in Middlesbrough. Our strategy sets out our vision and action plan for how the Council and our partners will support children and young people who are in our care, and our care leavers, to achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives. Transforming our approach to corporate parenting is a key priority for us as part of our wider improvement programme across our whole system of support for children and young people in Middlesbrough. Our progress in delivering positive change for children in care and care leavers will be a particular focus for our Strategic Multi-Agency Improvement Board, with support and challenge from our colleagues in DfE and Ofsted.

At a time when all children and young people face huge personal, social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities, we know that children in care and care leavers can face significant additional obstacles as they grow up and move towards independence and adult life. We also know from experience that with the right support, encouragement, love and nurturing, that children who have come through our care system will make a unique and invaluable contribution to all aspects of society, our culture, our economy and our communities. It is our responsibility as corporate parents to create the conditions for these precious children and young people to thrive and excel in their lives.

In order to most efficiently and effectively coordinate our activity, we have combined our Corporate Parenting strategy with our 'Permanency' and 'Sufficiency' plans for children and young people. This reflects our strong belief that improvements to social work practice are central to driving more effective strategic commissioning of placements. We are confident that the delivery of the priorities set out in this strategy will deliver progressively improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers. It is our ambition that an increasingly cost-effective system of support will enable us to refocus our resources towards early help and prevention for children and young people on the edge of care. Within this context, our Corporate Parenting strategy is critically aligned with the Futures for Families Programme in Middlesbrough (part-funded by the Department for Education).

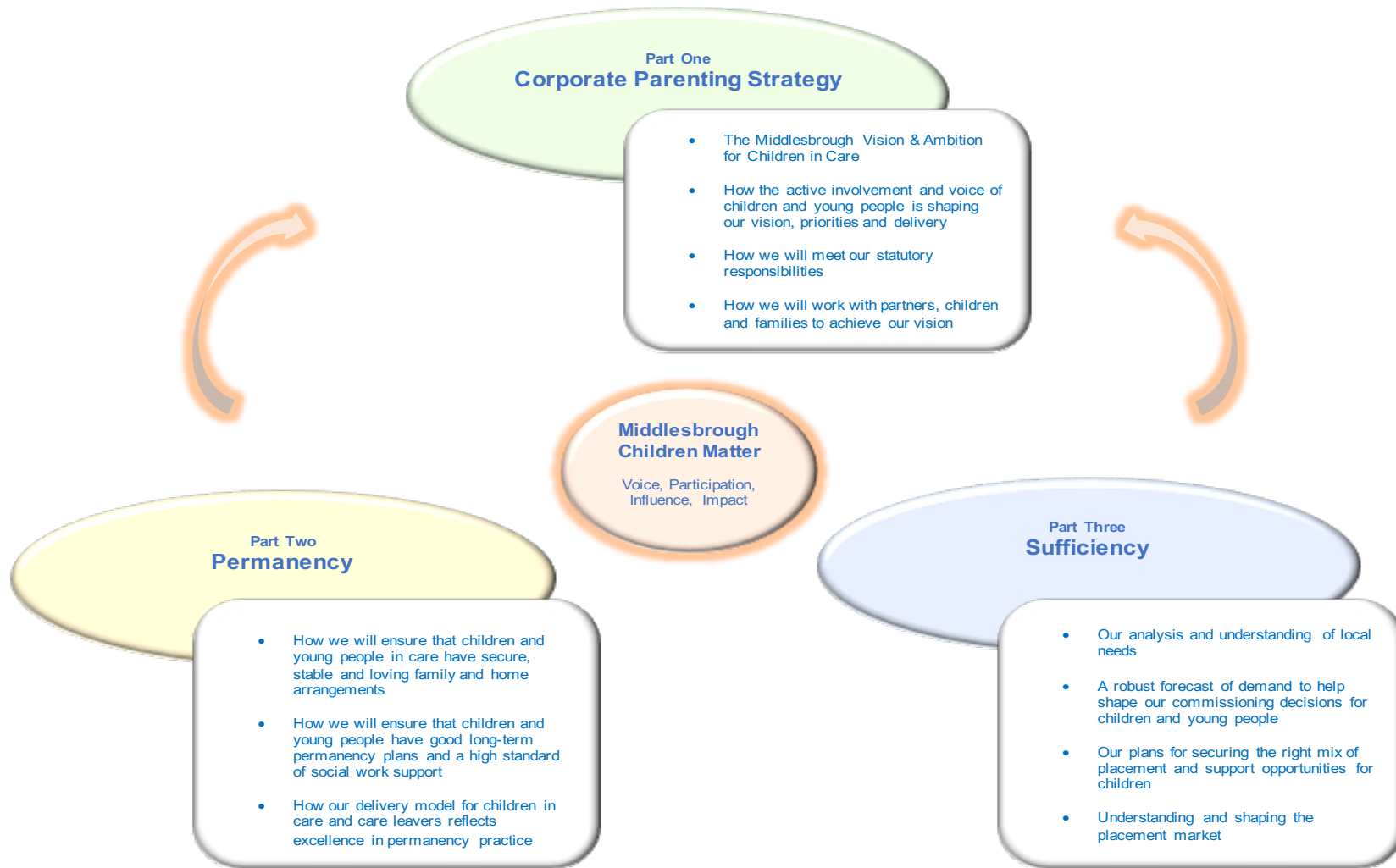
Our strategy is directly informed and shaped by the active involvement of local children and young people who have contributed their views and ideas based on their personal experiences, their aspirations and ambitions. This includes outputs from the work undertaken by our partnership with the innovative national Care Leaders organisation to develop our vision 'Middlesbrough Children Matter'. This has directly influenced our principles and priorities. Importantly, the governance and performance management arrangements for corporate parenting will ensure that children and young people will be engaged with the ongoing monitoring of our performance and will be persistently challenging the Council and our partners to deliver on the priorities we have agreed.

We are passionate and deeply committed to our children in care and our care leavers, and it is with great excitement and a profound sense of our personal accountability that we approach the delivery of this Corporate Parenting strategy for Middlesbrough. We are particularly grateful to DfE, Ofsted and our Improvement Partners including North Yorkshire Council who have been a source of support and inspiration for the content and approach we have adopted in our strategy document.

### Signatories

<i>Cllr Antony High, Lead Member for Children's Social Care</i>	.....
<i>Cllr Alma Hellaoui, Chair of Corporate Parenting Board</i>	.....
<i>Sue Butcher, Executive Director of Children's Services</i>	.....

## OUR CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY – HOW IT WORKS



## OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CORPORATE PARENTING – DEVELOPED WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The development of our Corporate Parenting strategy has included a programme of work to capture the most up-to-date voices, views and ideas of our children and young people. As well as influencing the content of our strategy, children and young people have shaped our decisions about how we will deliver our Corporate Parenting responsibilities. We have agreed with children and young people that all of our support for children in care and care leavers will respect a set of principles that reflect our shared values. The following principles have formed the basis of a consultation exercise with young people in Middlesbrough during the preparation of our Corporate Parenting strategy.



## PARTICIPATION – THE VOICE OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Our whole system of support for children and young people in Middlesbrough is moving through a process of change and transformation. The Council and our partners recognise that in order to achieve real and sustainable improvements for children and young people, that this will require us to take big and bold steps to strengthen the active involvement and participation of young people at every level. That is easily said, but to embed this approach will require a significant step-change, driven by people with the determination, skills, resources and support to drive this forward. This will include children, young people, frontline workers, our strategic leaders and elected members.

This means that we have to make it a key corporate and partnership priority to systematically capture the voice, experiences, views and ideas of children and young people on a continuous basis. We know that there is passionate commitment in Middlesbrough, from organisations and individuals that have the power to influence real change, to achieving this shift in our culture and practice. We are collectively committed to creating the conditions where we can evidence that children and young people are directly influencing the way we design, deliver and review the impact of our offer, across the whole system of support.

Our Participation Strategy, with support and challenge from our collaboration with innovative national influencers The Care Leaders (TCL) sets out how we are progressively moving towards realising our vision for outstanding voice, participation and influence that drives our whole system of support for children and young people in Middlesbrough.

### How Children and Young People Influence Local Services in Middlesbrough



## UNDERSTANDING CORPORATE PARENTING

Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most critically important jobs that we do in Middlesbrough Council. When a child or young person, for whatever reason, is not able to safely stay at home, it is up to us to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve so that they feel safe and are able to thrive and meet their full potential.

Our ambition as corporate parents means that we are passionately committed to doing everything we can for every child and young person in our care, to give them the opportunities that other children and young people get. This covers everything from ensuring that they have a safe, happy and stable home environment, actively supporting their positive progress through education and learning, looking after their physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing, and supporting them through a positive transition into adult life.

We are ambitious for the children in our care, encouraging them to dream big and take chances even if they don't feel like that's been an option in the past. We need to facilitate and empower our children in care to have a say in key decisions that affect their lives.

Page 43 Our responsibility and passion as corporate parents is also about the smaller things that make life more fulfilling. It's about making sure children receive birthday cards, are rewarded when they do well (and supported when they don't), that they get to take part in the activities they enjoy and have new experiences. It's about making sure someone's on the end of a phone when a care leaver is having a hard day at work or university, or is there to help them navigate an application form. It's about doing the things you would do for your own children.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 defined for the first time in law the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure, as far as possible, secure, nurturing and positive experiences for children in care, and care leavers. Under the Children Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to promote cooperation between 'relevant partners', including the police, the NHS and education providers, while those partners have a duty to cooperate with the local authority in turn. Guidance on the Act highlights that corporate parenting is a 'task that must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies'.

Our formal collective responsibilities as corporate parents can be illustrated as three levels:



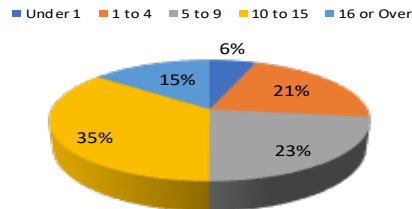
## SOME KEY FACTS ABOUT OUR CHILDREN IN CARE

A snapshot of the some of the key characteristics of the current children and young people in our care offers some headlines from which we can develop our lines of enquiry in order to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the individual stories and experiences of each individual child and young person. This is the critical starting point for our permanency and sufficiency planning.

### Numbers

Middlesbrough currently have 683 children in our care (as at Oct 2020). That is a rate of 208 (per 10,000 10-17 population). This places us amongst the highest regional and national ratings.

**Children & Young People in Our Care (By Age, June 2020)**

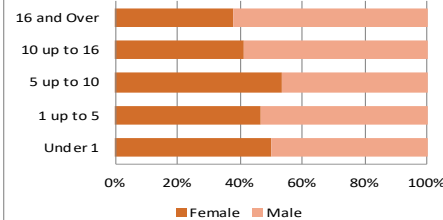


### Age & Gender

Of the current children and young people in our care:

- 20 young people (3%) started their care episode when they were over 16 years old
- 55 (8%) of children currently in our care over the age of 10 were brought into care when they were 5 years old or younger
- 15% of children in our care were newborns aged 0-1 – higher than the national average

**Children & Young People in Our Care (by Age & Gender, June 2020)**



### Gender & Siblings

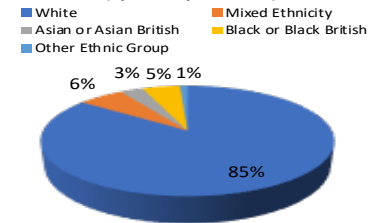
Middlesbrough has a similar female/male ratio as our statistical neighbours and the north east region

There are proportionately more females in the younger 5-10 age group, and more males in the 16+ group

71% of our children in care have at least one other sibling in our care

16% of our children in care are in a sibling group of four or more children

**Children & Young People in Our Care (by Ethnicity, June 2020)**



### Ethnicity

85% of current Children in Care are white. This is an over-representation compared with school population (78%)

6% are mixed ethnicity

3% are Asian. This is an under-representation compared with school population (11%)

5% are Black. This is an over-representation compared with school population (2%)

0.9% are Other Ethnicity. This is an under representation compared with school population (4%)

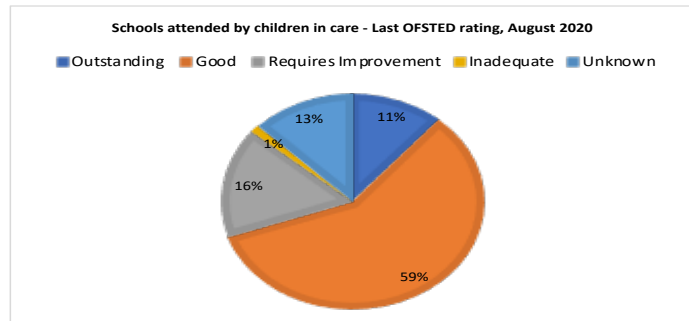
*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*



## CHILDREN IN CARE & EDUCATION

It is a core responsibility for us as corporate parents to ensure that children and young people in our care have the best possible education and learning opportunities. Our Virtual School arrangements ensure that we maintain a distinct focus on education outcomes for children in our care. The action we are taking to improve outcomes for children is supported by highly collaborative partnerships with schools and other learning providers. We are working with our partners to take positive action to secure a more consistent education experience for all of our children in care.

Attainment of children in care		
	Middlesbrough CLA 12m+ 2019 %	Middlesbrough CLA 12m+ 2020 "predicted TA" %
Early Years GLD	45	68
KS1 R/W/M	37	39
KS1 Reading	52	42
KS1 Writing	42	45
KS1 Maths	49	39
KS2 R/W/M	37	47
KS2 Reading	49	60
KS2 Writing	51	55
KS2 Maths	52	65
KS4 Basics 5+	10.7	13.33



Attainment outcomes for children in care are improving. The exceptions are KS1 Reading and Maths where targeted interventions are in place to drive improvement. Our Virtual School is taking action to minimise adverse impact on learning outcomes from Covid19

There have been no permanent exclusions for the last 3 years, and a significant positive reduction in the number of children in our care subject to fixed term exclusions. There is a positive increase in the proportion of our children in care who are attending school regularly

89% of our children in care have an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP) that is aligned with their wider care and permanency planning. 65% of PEP's are good or better quality. We are striving to improve outcomes in this area

70% of our children in care attend a school that was rated 'outstanding' or 'good' in the last Ofsted inspection. Our School Improvement team are sharply focused on raising performance where improvement is required

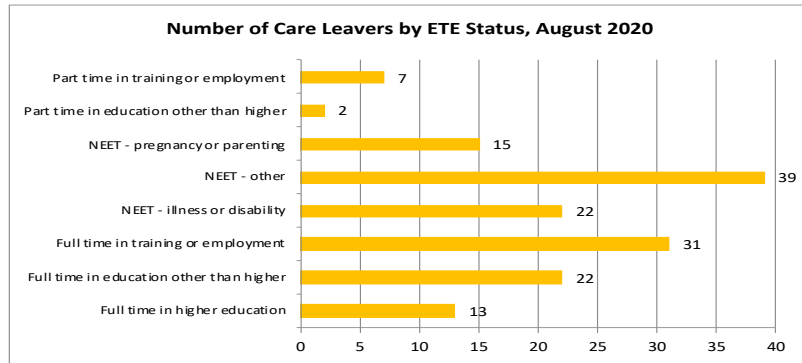
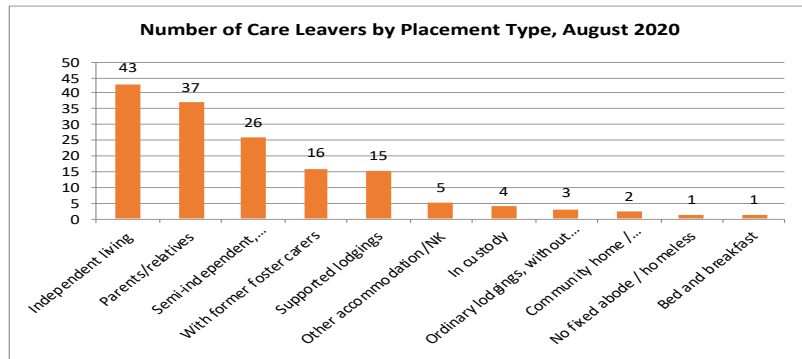
27% of our children in care receive support with special educational needs (without an Education and Healthcare Plan - EHCP)

Only 15% have an EHCP this is low against national comparators - we are analysing this to inform action and next steps

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## SOME KEY FACTS ABOUT OUR CARE LEAVERS

Young people who are on the pathway to independence and are preparing to leave our care are a distinct group requiring access to support, information and resources at this critical point of transition to adult life. With our partners we are working with care leavers to secure positive education, employment and training opportunities, safe and stable places to live and swift access to specialist services and support when this is required.



28% of our Care Leavers are living independently whilst nearly a quarter reside with parents or relatives. 17% live in semi-independent transitional accommodation. A small number continue to live with their foster carers and we are looking to increase this model going forward.

The proportion of our Care Leavers living in suitable accommodation has risen steadily over the last 4 years to above statistical neighbour and regional averages. It is a priority for us to cease the small number of unregulated placements.

Whilst the proportion of our Care Leavers in education, employment or training has been rising since 2017, half of our Care Leavers are NEET (not in education, employment or training). Increasing this proportion is a critical priority for our work with Care Leavers

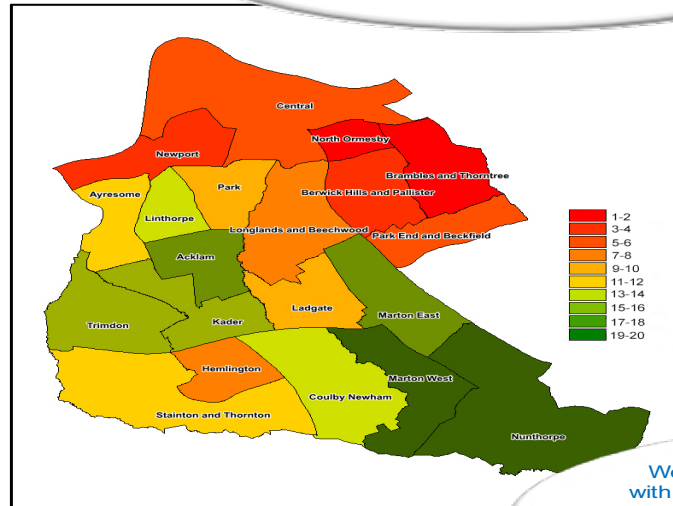
An increasing proportion of our Care Leavers are entering Further and Higher Education opportunities

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

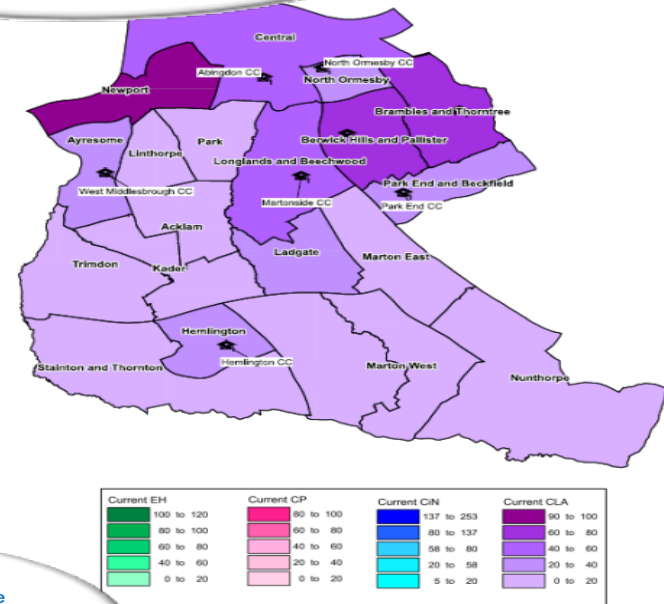
## OUR LOCAL PICTURE (Data at June 2020)

As we develop and deliver our Corporate Parenting Strategy we are using our local data to grow our understanding of the specific issues faced by children, young people and their families within our local communities. This increasingly focused analysis at neighborhood level will inform our support for children in our care as well as preventive work to most effectively target our resources towards children on the edge of care. This work is aligned with our wider corporate Council and multi-agency and partnership initiatives to develop our town, our communities and our economy.

Our wards within Middlesbrough are amongst the most deprived in the UK based on the indices of multiple deprivation (Range of 1-20 from most to least deprived)



There are greater levels of Children's Services intervention in the most deprived wards. In the most part this is reflected in the home postcodes of children who are in our care

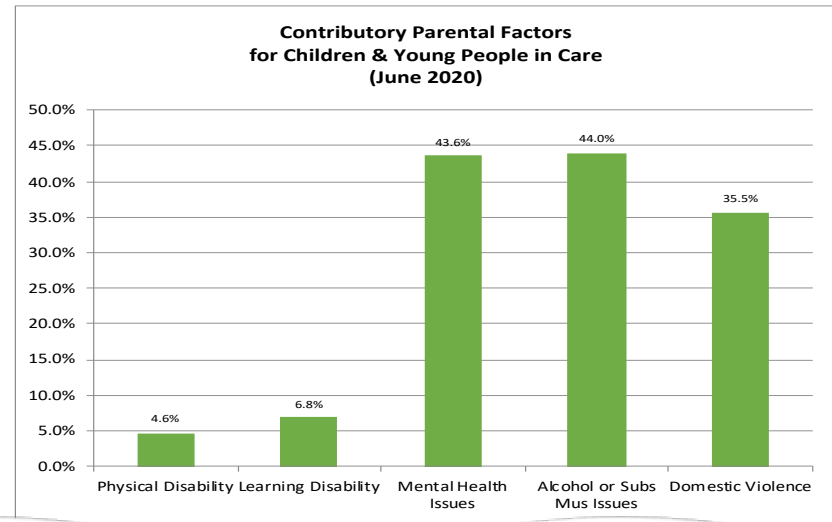
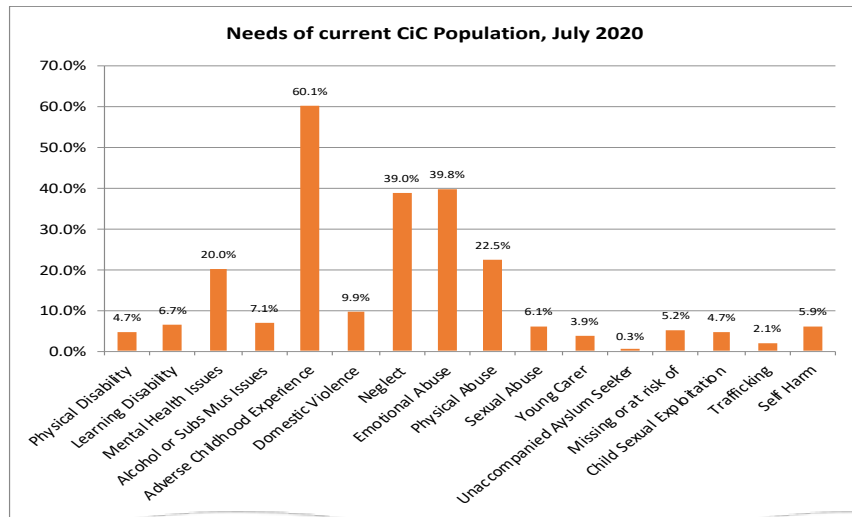


We are working within the Council and with our partners to understand the nature of demand in our most deprived communities in order to most effectively target preventive interventions at the critical stage before need escalates

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF OUR CHILDREN IN CARE (Data at June 2020)

There are many different reasons why children and young people need a period of time in our care. Identifying and understanding the experience of each individual child is the critical first step towards ensuring that we provide the most appropriate home for them, and the most effective care and support for them to achieve permanence, whether through a supported return to their family home, in an adopted home or in our longer-term care.



60% of our children and young people in care have experienced adverse childhood experiences and related trauma

This highlights the scale of complex and acute need requiring a multi-agency response and the provision of specialist support and placements

22% of our children and young people in care have experienced a critical combination of parental factors (Domestic Violence; Parental Substance Misuse and Parental Mental Health Issues)

The majority of children and young people in our care were well-known to our Children's Services Teams before coming into our care

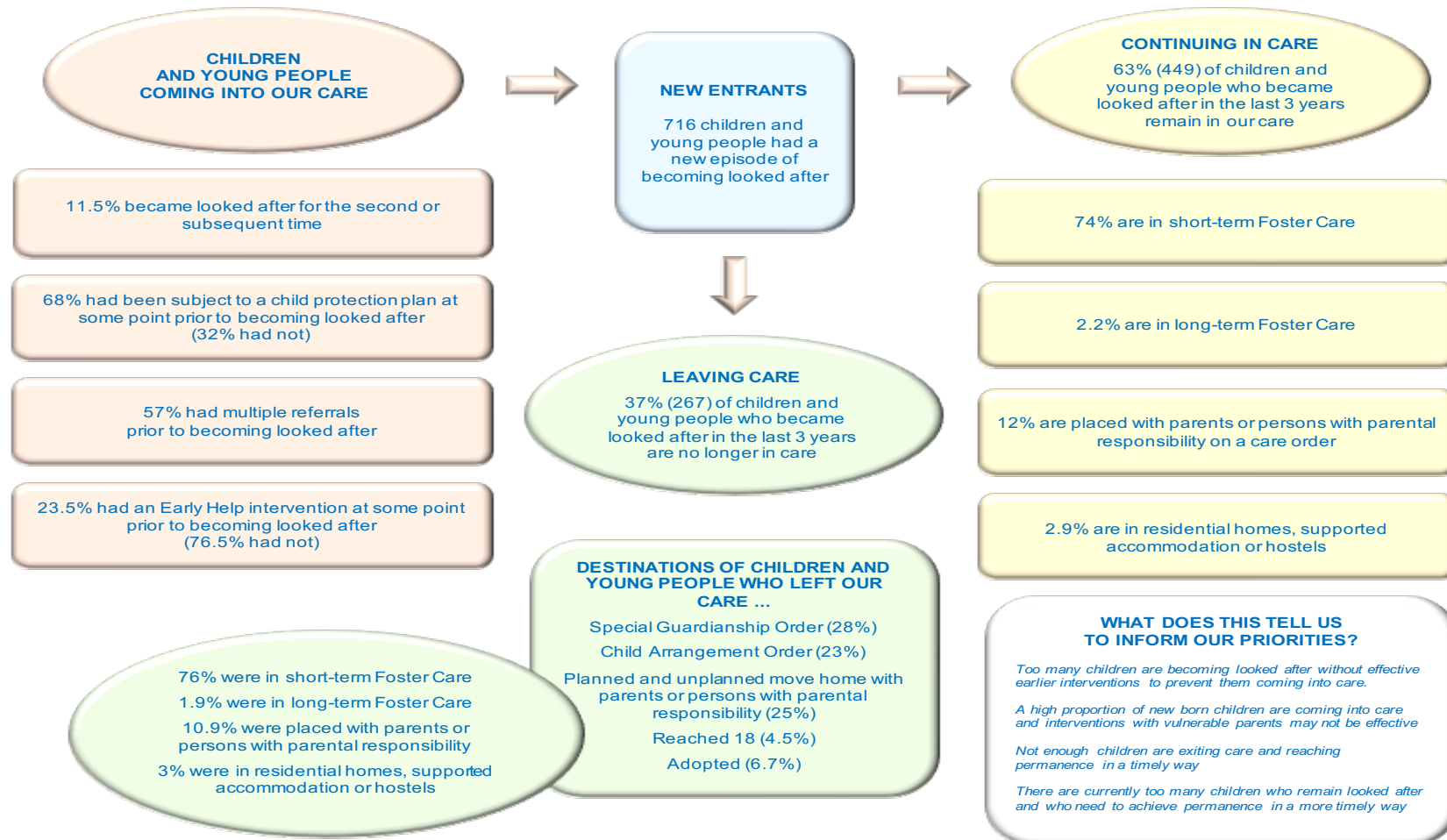
62% had a single or multiple referral to Children's Services before coming into our care and 69% were known to our Child Protection services

Our permanency and sufficiency arrangements are driven by a detailed analysis of the story behind this data, supported by our direct conversation with children, young people and their families. These are the foundations for progressive improvement in the way that we deliver our corporate parenting responsibilities in Middlesbrough.

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S JOURNEY

The diagram below provides further insight into the journey of children and young people who come into our care in Middlesbrough, and their individual permanence options and living arrangements. This illustration is based on data covering the 3-year period April 2017 to June 2020.

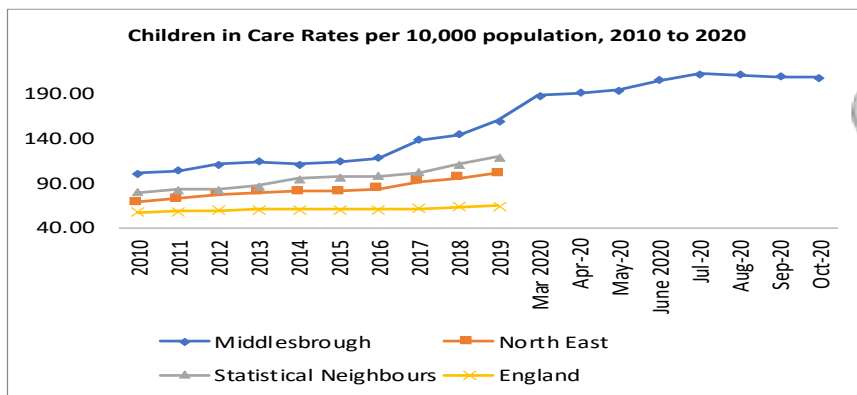


*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## UNDERSTANDING DEMAND

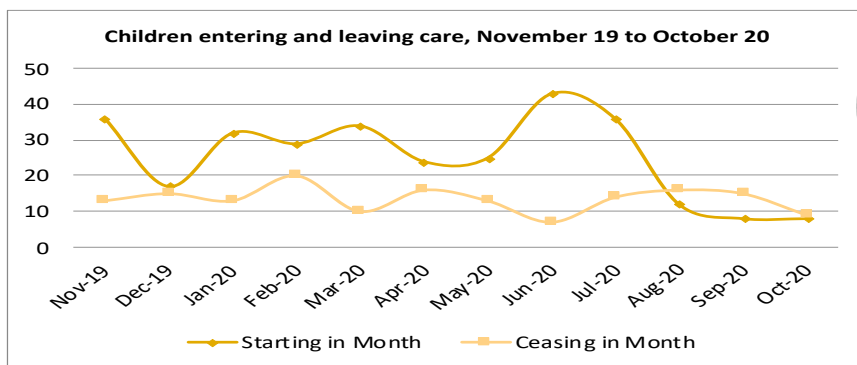
Our commitment to transforming outcomes for our children in care and care leavers is a key element of our wider Improvement Plan. Put simply, resourcing sustainable improvements for all children in Middlesbrough is heavily predicated on reducing the proportion of children and young people entering care, the period of time spent in care, and the increasingly high proportion of Council resources that are spent on high-cost external residential placements. We do not underestimate the scale of the challenge faced by the Council and our partners in achieving this. Whilst there is some emerging evidence that demand and new admissions to care may be slowing during 2020, the acute social, economic and demographic challenges faced by our communities in Middlesbrough are well-documented and provide a challenging context for driving sustainable improvement. These factors are brought sharply into focus when we consider some key facts around demand for our support for children in care and care leavers:

Page 50



The overall proportion of children and young people in care in Middlesbrough has increased continuously over the last 10 years. This has consistently exceeded the comparable increase for statistical neighbours, the north-east and England

Numbers of children in care have increased by 89% over the last 5 years. An accelerated increase throughout 2019/20 is reflected in a wider pattern of increased demand across the full range of our Children's Services provision



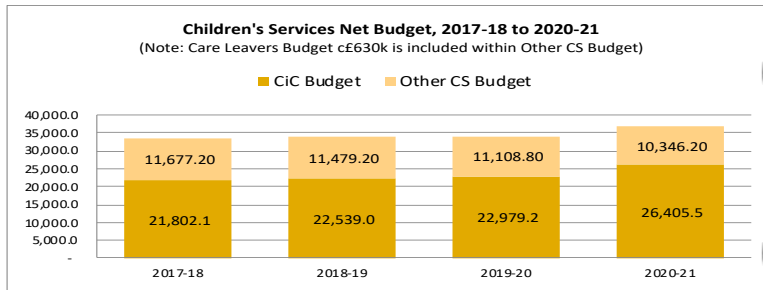
The resource impact of the steady increase in the numbers of children and young people entering care has been intensified by the correspondingly slow rate of children ceasing to be looked after

During the first 7 months of 2020 the rate of children coming into care has been around double the rate of children leaving care. However from July 2020 this trend has reversed, with more children leaving care than entering care

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

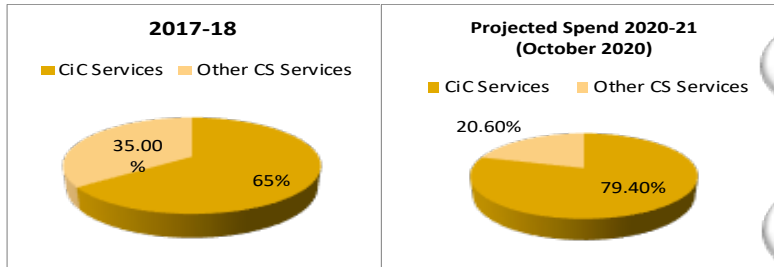
## RESOURCING OUR SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

An increasingly high proportion of our overall Children's Services budget is dedicated to our system of support for children in our care.



The total Children's Services Net Budget has increased 9.8% in the last 4 years rising from c£33.5m in 2017-18 to c£36.7m for 2020-21

In the same period the net budget for children in care services has risen by 21.1%. This is directly linked to the 40% increase in the number of children in care in March 2020 compared with March 2017



The proportion of the Children's Services Net Budget spent on children in care services has risen from 65% in 2017-18 to 79.4% in 2020-21 (Projected spend as of Oct 2020)

The impact of the disproportionate increase in expenditure on support for children in care and care leavers has been an 11.4% reduction in the net budget for other children's services in this 4 year period

In the last 4 years the number of children in our care has risen by approximately 40% - whilst the related budget has only risen by 21%. If this increase continues at the same pace over the next 3 years this would result in around *32% increase in our children in care population by March 2023*. A corresponding 16% increase in the related budget (matching the average rate of change over the last 4 years) would result in the cost rising to £30,500,000. This is *an increase of just over £4 million* and is clearly not sustainable. Coupled with the increasing proportion of children presenting with acute and complex needs illustrates the scale of our challenges as we forecast and plan forward. We have a clear three-pronged approach to this: To improve our social work and permanency practice; To strengthen the coherence and impact of our sufficiency arrangements and to progressively rebalance our resources towards prevention and support for children and young people on the edge of care.

[Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data](#)

## HOW WELL ARE WE DOING FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS?

There are significant and systemic areas that require improvement in our support for children in care and care leavers, but there are some good examples of delivery that provide early foundations for positive change.



*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*



## OUR GOVERNANCE FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

Achieving outstanding corporate parenting for our children and young people in Middlesbrough is a critical priority for the Council and our partners. The outcome of our Ofsted inspection of Children’s Services (published in January 2020) clearly indicated that our whole system of support for children and young people was failing. Transforming our corporate parenting offer is a central theme of our Improvement Plan. We have put in place clear governance arrangements to ensure robust oversight, scrutiny, pace and challenge as we take action to transform our corporate parenting offer.

Our governance for transforming corporate parenting includes the active engagement of multi-agency partners on our strategic Improvement Board, clear accountability from Elected Members on our Corporate Parenting Board and systematic challenge and drive from our Children in Care Council. We have created a dedicated Programme Board for Transforming Corporate Parenting, with the specific purpose of coordinating all critical strategic and operational action that is concerned with improving outcomes and impact for children in care and care leavers.

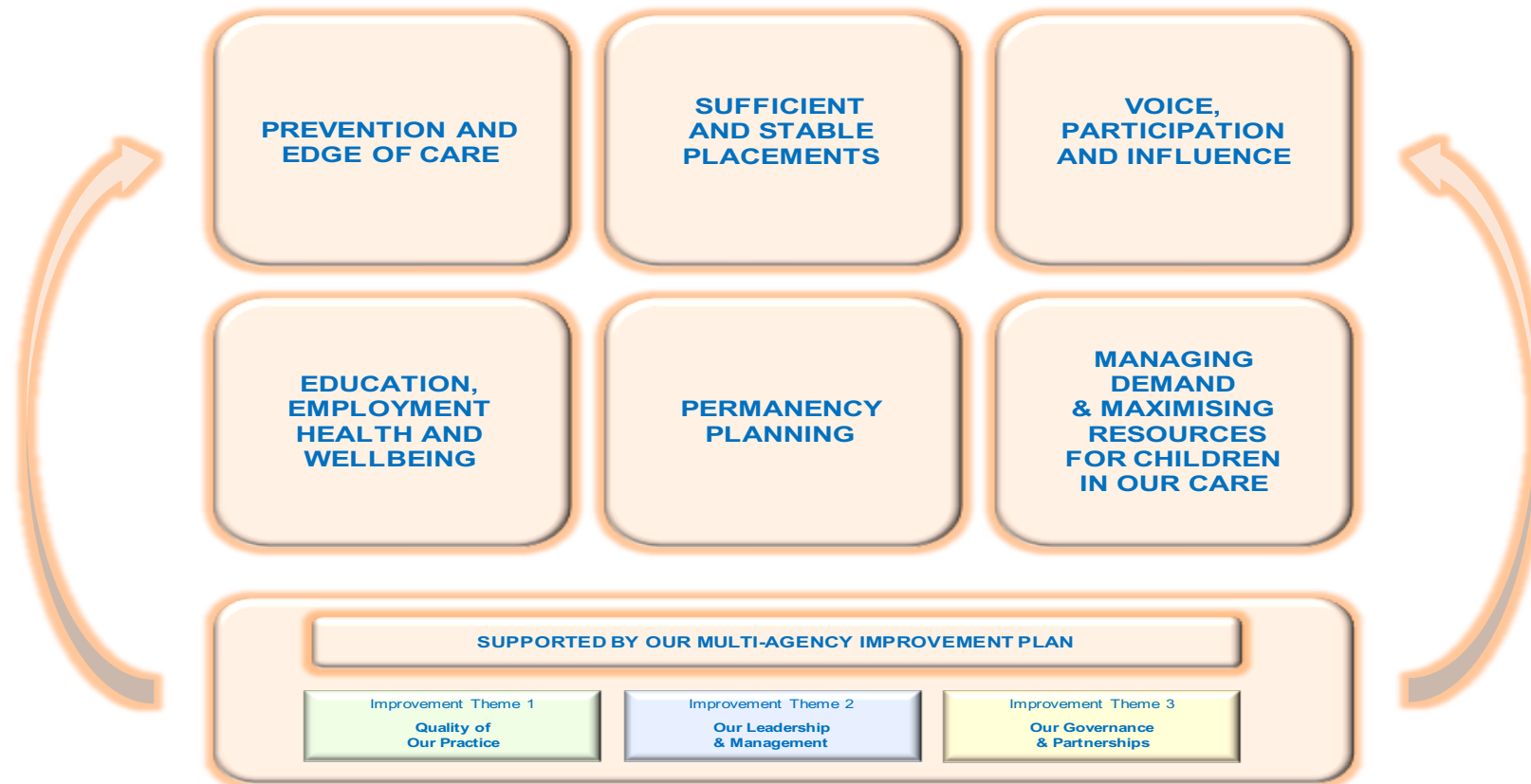


The transformation of our corporate parenting offer is supported by a strong emphasis on improving the way that we capture and make use of information to plan, deliver and evaluate impact. Our dedicated Programme Board is driving forward work to improve the quality and timeliness of our information, and the way that we analyse data to forward plan. This includes key performance data and evidence of the quality of services provided. There is a particular focus on strengthening the systematic capture of feedback from children, young people, families, staff and partners. Our ambition is to make increasing use of feedback to directly inform and influence the way we plan, deliver and evaluate impact for children and young people.

## OUR CORPORATE PARENTING PRIORITIES FOR 2020-23

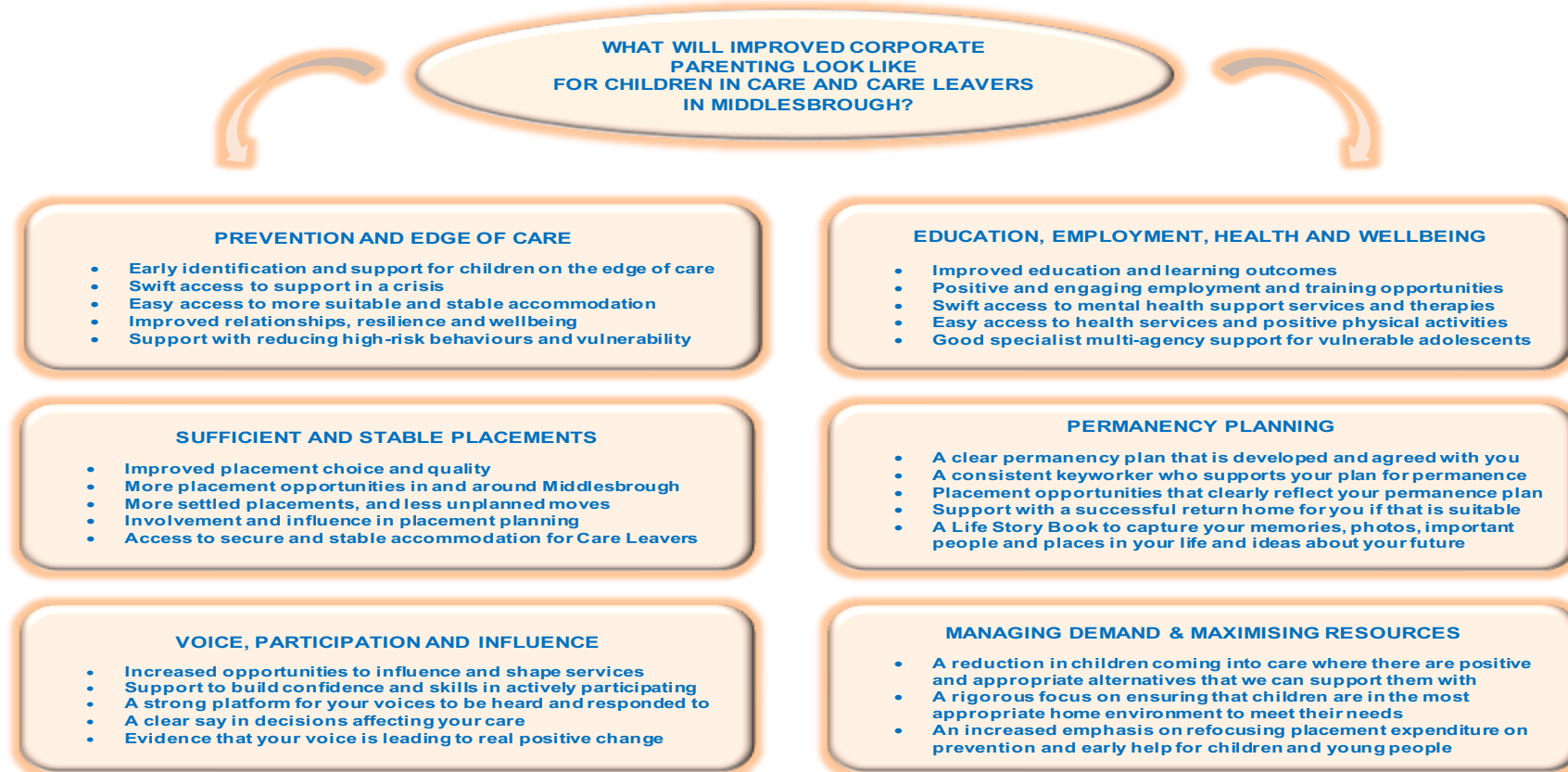
Our Multi-Agency Improvement Plan for children and young people in Middlesbrough clearly identifies what we need to do to strengthen the quality and impact of our support for children in care and care leavers, based on learning from our Ofsted inspection (published in January 2020), as well as feedback from children, young people, our staff and partners.

Driven directly from our Improvement Plan, our corporate parenting strategy is focused on six critical priorities that will have a high impact on outcomes for children in care and care leavers. These six priorities are supported by the wider programme of improvement across the whole system of support for children and young people in Middlesbrough.



## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?

Our six priorities for Corporate Parenting are linked to clearly identifiable improvements for children and young people. This will make it easy to assess whether or not we are delivering on our commitment and responsibilities as Corporate Parents.



The specific actions that we need to take to deliver on these six priorities are clearly set out within our Improvement Action Plan and are embedded within our performance management and self-evaluation framework. Our governance arrangements will provide robust oversight and challenge of the progress we are making for children and young people in Middlesbrough.

## PART TWO

# OUR PERMANENCY PLAN FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIDDLESBROUGH

2020-23



MIDDLESBROUGH  
**CHILDREN**  
M A T T E R

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## WELCOME TO OUR PERMANENCY STRATEGY

Welcome to our Permanency Strategy for our children and young people in Middlesbrough. As corporate parents we are determined that every individual child and young person in care, and our care leavers, has a safe, stable and positive experience of our care. This means that they have somewhere safe that they can call home, with positive and nurturing relationships that are fun, and that engage and inspire them, and support with a positive transition to independence and adult life. Most importantly we want to help every child and young person in our care to develop a strong sense of personal identity, security and belonging in the world.

Our Permanency Strategy is founded on the principles set out in our Corporate Parenting strategy, shaped by the voice and active participation of children and young people in Middlesbrough. We have also sought the views of foster carers, families, keyworkers and other people who are at the forefront of direct support that will deliver permanence for children in care and care leavers.

The main purpose of our Permanency Strategy is to set out in clear and uncomplicated terms the action that we will take across our whole system of support to positively transform our permanency practice and outcomes for children in care and care leavers. Specifically, this means delivering on essential improvements to our social work practice, our systems, processes and our partnership arrangements.

Achieving real and positive change will mean embedding good permanence practice into everything we do. It is about how as individual social workers and partner agency staff we develop positive, nurturing and listening relationships with children and young people; it is about securing and communicating placement options for children and young people that are well-matched with their needs and wishes, and ensuring that our systems are managed effectively to avoid drift and delay.

We need to be better at identifying and supporting children and young people who are at risk of coming into care, and our permanency practice needs to improve so that when children do come into care, we are relentlessly focused on their potential for a safe return home. Where children do need to remain in care, the quality of our assessment and care planning needs to improve, so that we are in a position to make well-informed decisions with children and young people about the most suitable permanency option for them.

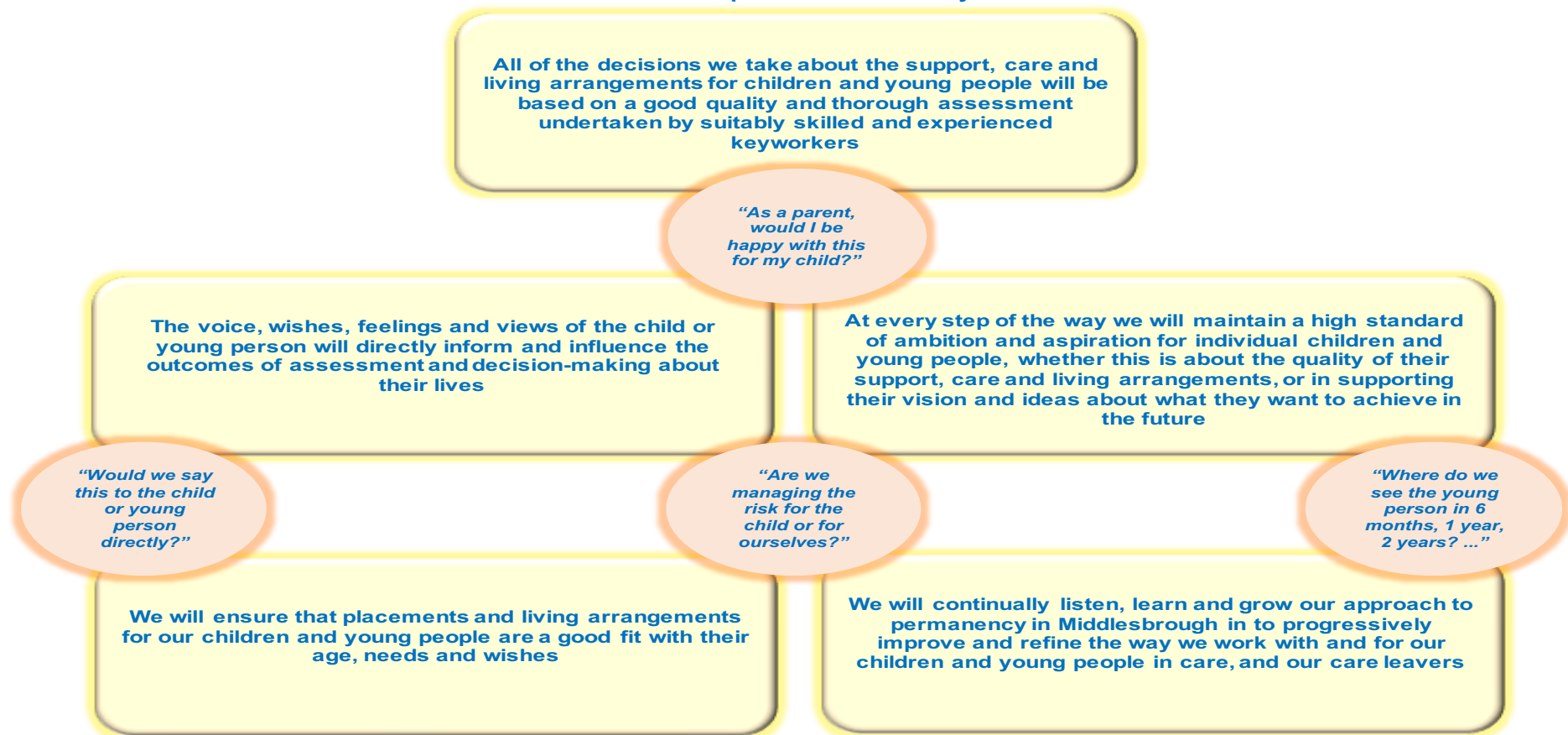
Embedding a culture of good permanence practice in Middlesbrough is core business for the local authority and is at the heart of our improvement journey. We do not underestimate the raw energy and rigour that it will take to deliver our ambitions for children and young people. Our determination to improve is shared with our local partners in Health, Education and other support services.

Ultimately, successful delivery of our Permanency Strategy will be judged by our individual children and young people. It is them to whom we are accountable. This strategy provides a point of reference for everyone involved in achieving our main purpose – to provide safe, stable and secure homes with loving families that will support our children and young people through childhood and in their transition to leaving care and adult life.

## OUR APPROACH TO PERMANENCY IN MIDDLESBROUGH

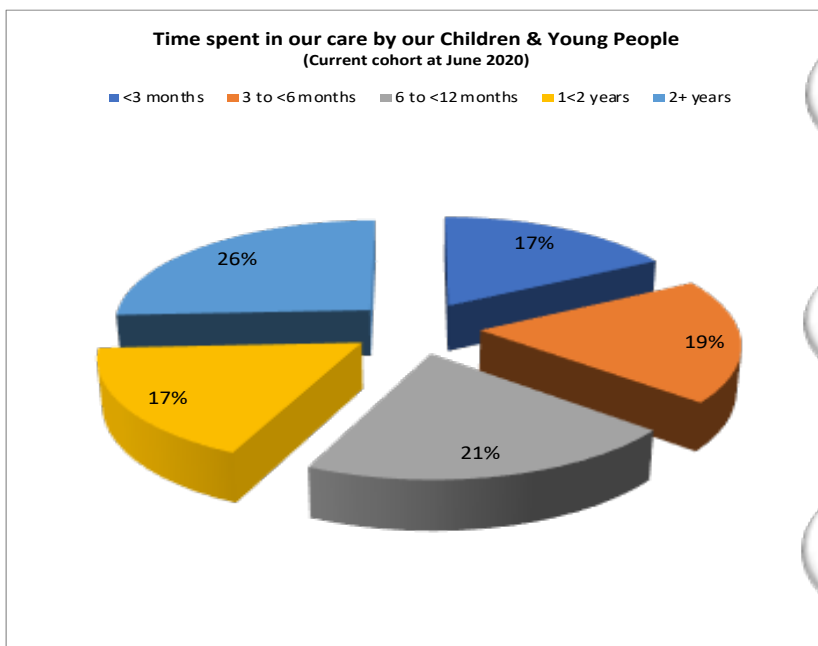
The core purpose of our permanency practice is to ensure that all children and young people in our care are growing up in stable, secure, safe and nurturing living arrangements, and are supported in a positive transition to independence and adult life. This is reflected in our social work practice, and in our systems, processes and partnerships for permanency. The provocations from Futures for Families 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.

### Our Principles for Permanency



## TIME SPENT IN OUR CARE – SOME KEY FACTS

Improving our approach to permanence for children in care and care leavers is a critical theme of our wider improvement plan in Middlesbrough. The time that children and young people are spending in our care is increasing, in parallel with increasing numbers of children and young people coming into care and a slowing in numbers leaving care. Our information and experience clearly indicates that too many children and young people are spending too long in our care before moving on to permanency.



Analysis of our information illustrates the average number of weeks spent in care for children and young people currently in our care is 141 weeks (2 years 9 months)

The proportion of children and young people who spend more than two years in our care has steadily risen over the last three years

When we consider this increase in time spent in care, coupled with decreasing numbers leaving our care, this clearly highlights an urgent need to transform our permanency practice, and to tackle drift and delay for individual children and young people

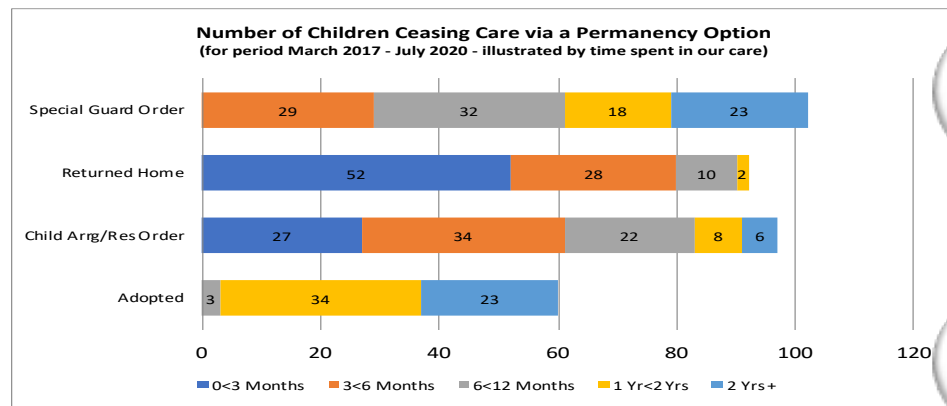
Improving permanency outcomes for each of these individual children and young people requires us to make deep and sustained improvements to our social work practice, to the way that we use, share and develop our information and data to drive decision-making and momentum, and to tackle drift and delay for children, and to the way we commission support and permanency options from within our own services and the wider marketplace.

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*



## TIMESCALES FOR PERMANENCY – SOME KEY FACTS

There are radically differing timescales by which children and young people achieve permanency and subsequently cease their time spent in our care. These varying timescales reflect the need for significant improvements in our social work practice, our decision-making processes, our commissioning arrangements and our multi-agency working. Most importantly, these variances do not offer children and young people the quality of process and pace that they have the right to expect from us.



There are widely varying timescales for children and young people achieving permanency and leaving care depending on their permanence outcome. These timescales are in the main below target requirements and do not compare favourably with comparator authorities

To a very limited degree this variance can be ascribed to specific circumstances of individual children, but the degree of variance and the average times taken clearly indicate the need for a transformation of our culture and practice around permanency

Only 60% of children and young people who have been in our care for more than four months have a Permanency Plan (at Oct 2020)

Average Days to Achieving Permanency and Ceasing to be in our care (for period March 2017 – July 2020)			
Return home to person with parental responsibility	Child Arrangement or Residence Order	Special Guardianship Order	Adoption
Average 113 days (92 children)	Average 228 days (97 children)	Average 448 days (102 children)	Average 775 days (60 children)

An increasing focus on improving the quality and analysis of our permanency data will be critical for effective, realistic and challenging target-setting to drive and understand the impact of the improvements we are making to permanency outcomes for individual children and young people.

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## OUR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE MODEL

The way we develop and implement highly effective permanency practice is an integral part of our social work practice model for supporting children and young people in Middlesbrough. Our practice model **Children and Relationships First** has been developed in collaboration with our workforce as a key pillar of our improvement programme. Our practice model builds on best regional and national practice and innovation in Children's Services.



The development and implementation of our practice model is supported by our new **Centre for Practice Excellence**. This provides a coordinated approach to driving innovation and best practice across our whole system of support for children and young people, including our Permanence arrangements. The Centre for Practice Excellence offers tools and resources to support our practice model, workforce development to ensure staff have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver on our commitments to local children and young people, quality assurance arrangements and opportunities to share and develop best practice and to drive innovation across the system.

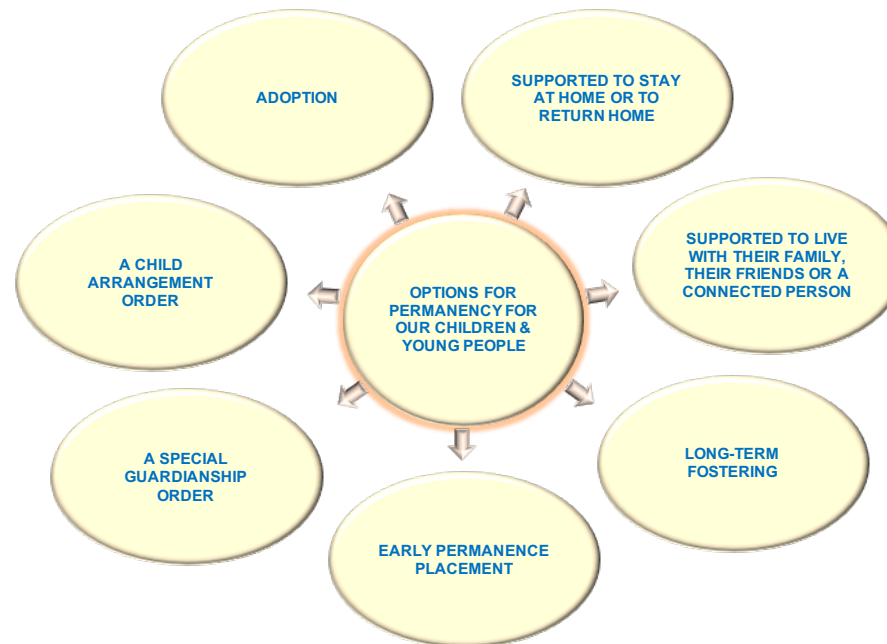
## OUR PATHWAY TO PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Our social work practice for achieving permanence for children and young people operates within a clear pathway through our system of support in Middlesbrough. This provides a reference point for our professional practice and decision-making:



## OPTIONS FOR PERMANENCY

From our very first point of contact with a child or young person we will be working alongside them to understand their individual needs and wishes, and to complete a thorough assessment that will inform decisions about the most suitable permanency option for them. The potential range of permanency options is illustrated below. Each permanency option is outlined in more detail on the following pages.



Wherever possible and appropriate we will work with the child or young person to identify a placement in the local area, with supported access to family, friends and other networks that will offer support and build resilience. It will only be in exceptional circumstances that a child or young person is placed outside of Middlesbrough. This decision would be driven by a thorough assessment of needs, and should not be a result of insufficient local placement sufficiency. The option of returning home, or of returning to a placement in the local area, will be a primary consideration for the child or young person at every stage of their permanence planning. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will be key to ensure that these options are fully addressed, with skill and sensitivity.

## OUR PRIORITIES FOR PERMANENCY

The transformation of our permanency practice in Middlesbrough is a well-evidenced key priority in our Strategic Improvement Plan. Our insight has been further developed by the analysis of our data undertaken for our Corporate Parenting strategy, including increasingly rich capture of the voice and experiences of children and young people (supported by the work we are doing with our third sector partners The Care Leaders). This points us towards six priority areas for action which we believe will create a permanency system that fits together and delivers for our children and young people.



## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?

Our six priorities for Permanency are linked to clearly identifiable improvements for children and young people. This will make it easy to assess whether or not we are delivering on the systemic transformation of our permanency arrangements in Middlesbrough.



The specific actions that we need to take to deliver on these six priorities are clearly set out within our Permanency Action Plan and are embedded within our performance management and self-evaluation framework. Our governance arrangements will provide robust oversight and challenge of the progress we are making for children and young people in Middlesbrough.

**PART THREE**

A large, stylized heart graphic in the background, composed of concentric layers of purple, pink, and yellow. Inside the heart, three hands are shown in white, blue, and yellow, reaching towards each other.

**OUR SUFFICIENCY PLAN  
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE  
IN MIDDLESBROUGH  
2020-23**



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## WELCOME TO OUR SUFFICIENCY PLAN

Welcome to our Sufficiency Plan for children and young people in Middlesbrough. The purpose of our plan is to set out a clear framework for how we will work with our partners across Middlesbrough and the surrounding area to secure the best possible range of placement opportunities and support services for our children in care and care leavers.

This applies to our whole permanency pathway for children and young people, from prevention and support for children on the edge of care, through to accommodation and support for our care leavers. Our Sufficiency Plan is firmly located within our Corporate Parenting Strategy and aligned with our Permanency Plan.

Successful delivery of our Sufficiency Plan is critical to achieving our wider improvement priorities across our whole system of support for children and young people in Middlesbrough. We know that in order to secure sustainable improvements in the quality and impact of our services, that we have to be much more effective in tackling the number of children and young people coming into care in Middlesbrough. In parallel with this we must be more effectively supporting the experience and outcomes for those children and young people whilst steadily redirecting our finite resources from high spend on external placements towards prevention and early intervention.

Sustainable improvement in these areas will be underpinned by improvements to our strategic commissioning arrangements. Within this context, we aspire to reach beyond our statutory sufficiency duty to create the conditions for innovation and excellence in the way that we collaborate with our partners in health, education and community settings in Middlesbrough to understand the needs of our children and young people.

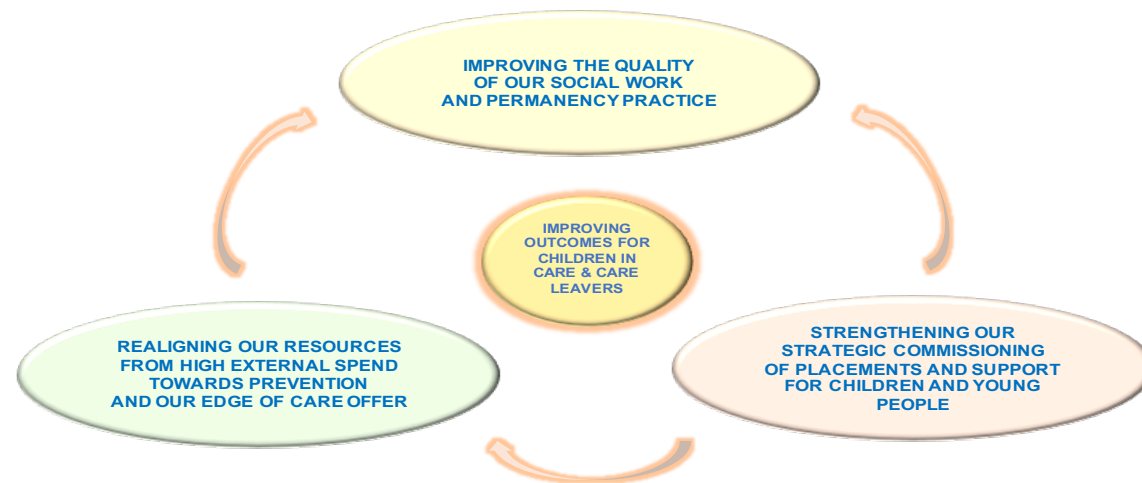
We will work in partnership to shape our commissioning and delivery arrangements in a way that makes a positive difference to the quality and impact of our offer, and to the way we are maximising the impact of our combined multi-agency resources. Strengthening our relationships and dialogue with the external market of potential provider organisations at an early stage in our sufficiency planning will be a key feature of our approach.

Achieving this way of working in Middlesbrough will require a step-change in our culture, systems and practice at all levels of our system of support for children in care and care leavers – from our strategic commissioning and relationships with partners and the marketplace, through to our direct practice and the relationship between social workers and children that is our core business.

Our Sufficiency Plan sets out our understanding of need and forecast demand, and how our strategic commissioning of placements and support services for children and young people will be shaped to deliver the best possible outcomes and life chances for our children and young people.

## OUR APPROACH TO SUFFICIENCY IN MIDDLESBROUGH

Our sufficiency planning for children in care and care leavers is aligned with the action we are taking to improve the quality of social work practice across the system, and our action to progressively shift the balance of our resources from high-cost external placement spend towards prevention and support for children and young people on the edge of care.

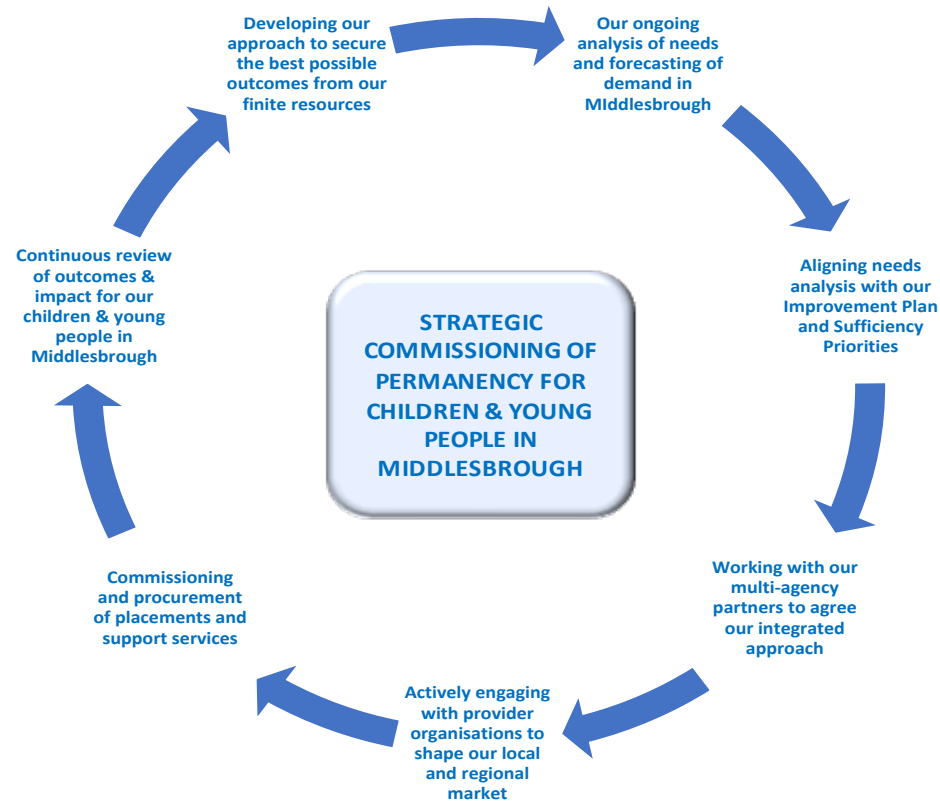


Delivery of these three integrated elements of change is business-critical to achieving the wider improvement priorities set out in our Strategic Improvement Plan. Success will require a significant shift in our corporate working and partnership arrangements:

- We will build on internal strengths to create a more effective links between the direct delivery of our frontline services for children and young people, and our internal commissioning arrangements within the Council. We will work together to develop our relationships, practice and processes to achieve this.
- We will actively engage with our multi-agency partners to agree and implement a more integrated approach to understanding need. This includes working together to shape our internal commissioning arrangements and to grow our the local and regional provider relationships
- We will focus our resource management at all levels in the Council to ensure that our resources are deployed where we can have the most positive impact for individual children. Our resource decisions will be aligned with wider Council action to transform the quality of life and outcomes for local communities in Middlesbrough.

## OUR COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUFFICIENCY

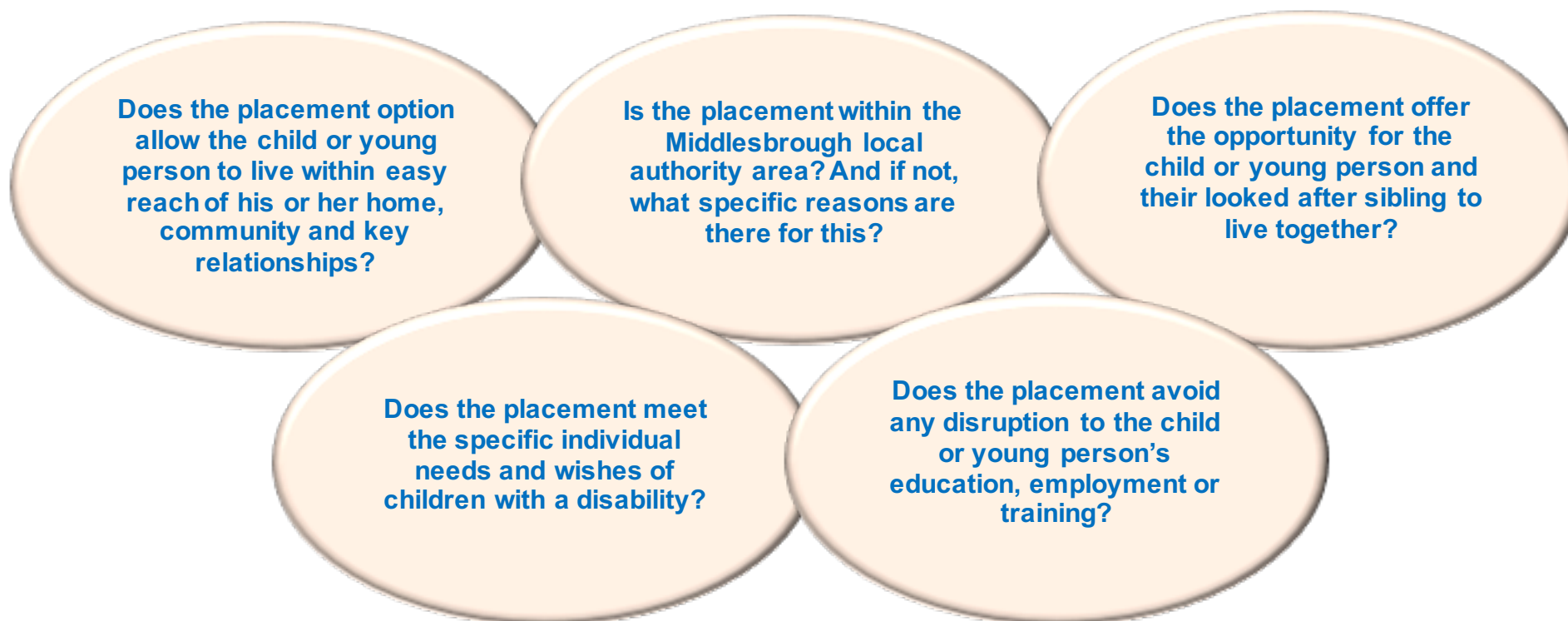
We recognise that securing delivery of our ambitions for sustainable positive improvement in our permanency and sufficiency for children and young people in Middlesbrough will require a step-change in our commissioning arrangements. We are building on the strong skills and knowledge of our established commissioning and procurement teams in Middlesbrough to put in place a model that is founded on best practice from across the Children's Services sector.



Whilst this will take time to fully embed, we have already taken steps as part of the work underpinning our Corporate Parenting strategy to secure the capacity, expertise and momentum that will gradually transform our approach as part of this critical phase of commissioning for improvement.

## OUR COMMISSIONING PROVOCATIONS FOR CHILDREN IN CARE & CARE LEAVERS

Our approach to commissioning placement capacity and support provision for our children in care and care leavers has been developed with particular reference to statutory sufficiency requirements that can be expressed as five key 'provocations' at all levels of our strategic and operational decision-making for children and young people:



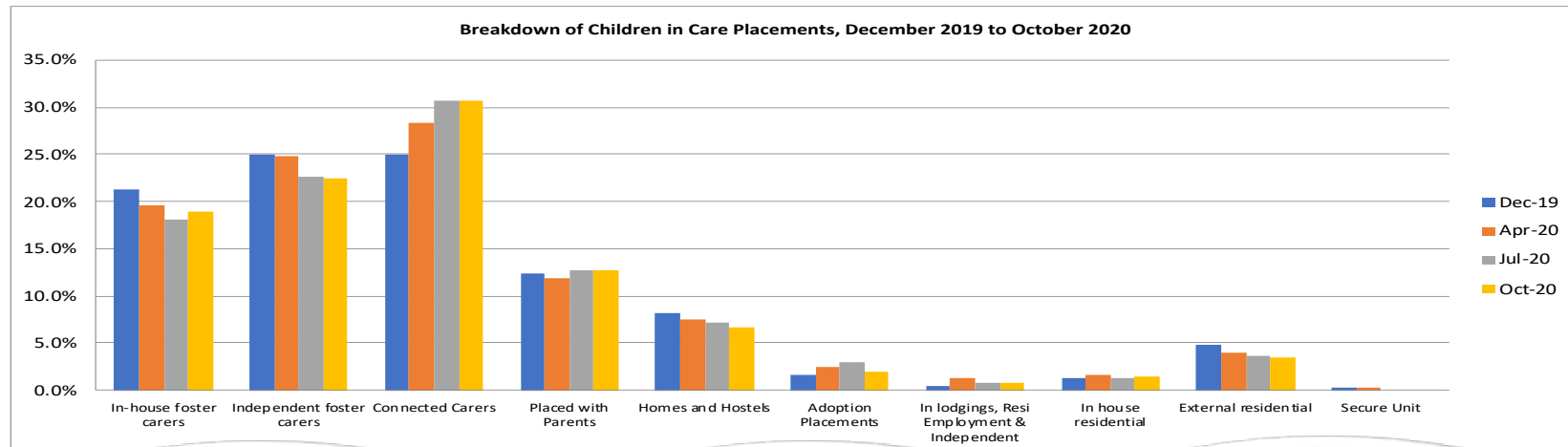
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These provocations provide a practical reference point for our commissioners and our frontline social work staff when we are considering permanency options for children in care and care leavers. This is directly reflected in our policy and practice guidance which will inform how we shape our local market, through to the point where our direct decision-making with children and young people about the best possible permanency option for them.

## PLACEMENTS FOR OUR CHILDREN IN CARE – SOME KEY FACTS

As corporate parents, it is our responsibility to secure the most appropriate, safe and stable placement option for individual children and young people. In parallel with progressive improvements to the quality of our social work practice and permanency planning, it is a critical priority for us to transform the way that we work with our partners and accommodation providers to develop a range of options that reflect children and young people’s needs and that these options are wherever possible within or close to Middlesbrough and the child or young person’s family and friends.

Analysis of the spread of placements for children and young people in our care during 2019/20 illustrates some key trends that will directly inform our sufficiency and commissioning arrangements from 2020. (Note: *Further interpretation of this data is available in the Evidence Summary paper that supports this strategy*)



As of July 2020 more than 50% of children were placed outside of Middlesbrough – reflecting the limited availability of suitable local accommodation to meet the scale and complexity of children and young people’s needs

The proportion of children and young people placed more than 20 miles from their home postcode has historically been higher than statistical neighbour and regional averages and has steadily increased during 2016-2020 from 11% to 18%

The proportion of children and young people who are placed with connected carers has risen from 25% to 31% over the last 12 months – understanding this increase is a key line of enquiry for our permanency and sufficiency planning

There is a decreasing use of in-house and independent foster carers – reflecting the need to develop capacity, skills and multi-agency wraparound for our carers

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## RESOURCING PLACEMENTS FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The positive resourcing implications of more effective sufficiency and permanence planning, and how this might benefit our wider improvement priorities in Middlesbrough are clearly illustrated when we consider that *93% of our net budget for children in care and care leavers is projected to be spent on placements* in 2020/21. An overview of our projected placement spend for 2020/21 highlights some key themes to inform and focus our commissioning intentions:

**2020-21 CiC Net Budget - Placement Budget**



The greater proportion of our placement expenditure (39%) is on external residential placements, typically for children and young people with a disability and/or special educational needs – but also for other children where a suitable internal placement could not be identified

Our expenditure on residential placements has grown significantly over the last four years – an increase on 94% on internal residential placements and 38% on external residential

Our combined internal and external residential placement spend equates to half of our overall predicted placement spend over the next 12 months

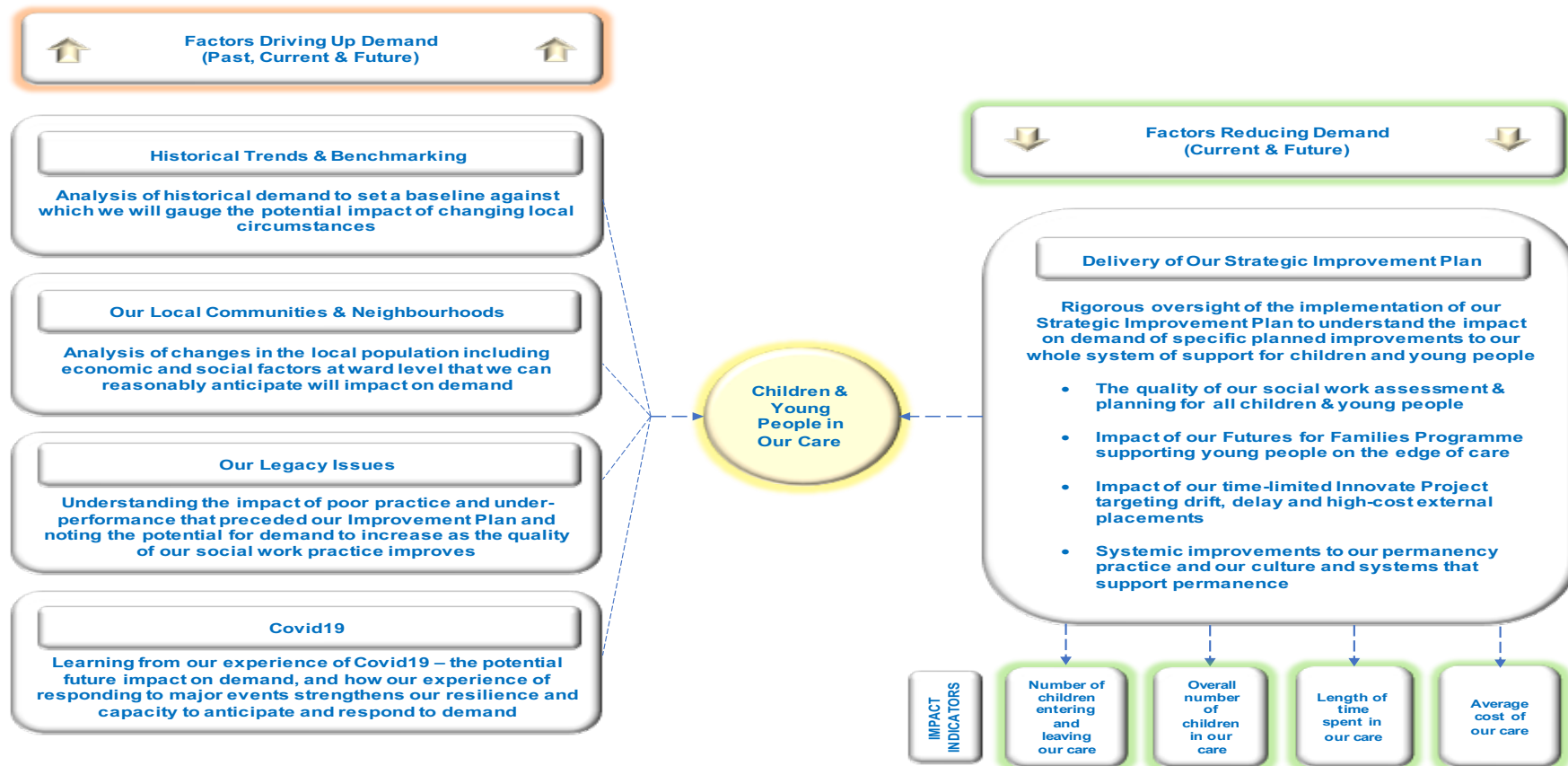
Over £6 million has been spent on the most expensive 11 placements over the last 12 months

Our predicted expenditure (for 2020/21) on independent fostering placements is 21% - compared with only 12% on our in-house fostering

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## OUR FORECASTING MODEL

Developing a robust forecasting methodology to inform and drive our sufficiency and commissioning activity for children and young people is a key improvement priority for Middlesbrough. The Council are moving towards implementation for Children’s Services of a new operating model for forecasting which has been successfully applied in Adult Services. However, the programmed approach to embedding this will take 18-24 months to become fully operational. In the intervening period we have worked across the Council to agree a forecasting model that is supported by a rich analysis of our data, and builds on experience from other areas. This model that can be adapted and easily updated to reflect our evolving local circumstances.

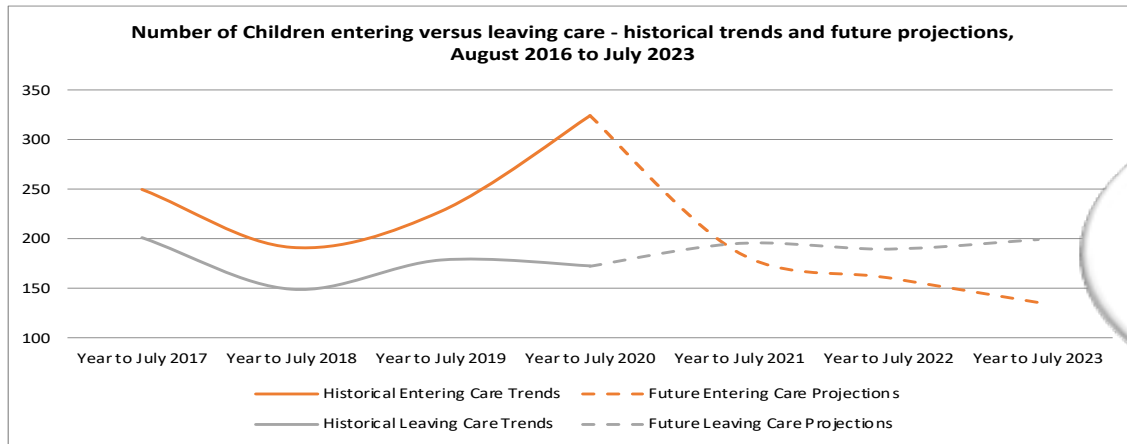


*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

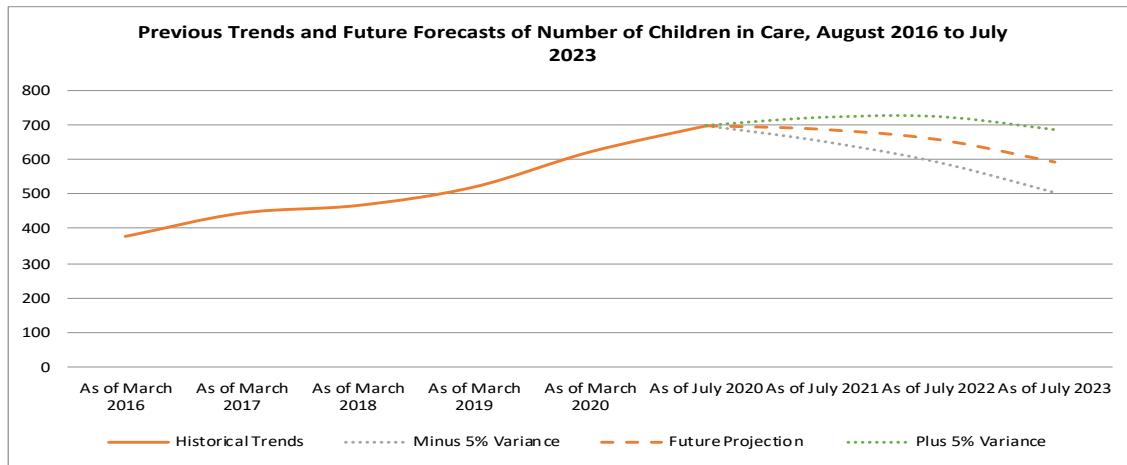
## FORECASTING DEMAND – OUR INITIAL ANALYSIS

Our initial analysis and the assumptions that underpin this modelling are outlined in detail in the Evidence Summary document which supports this strategy. Some early forecasting is indicated in the charts below.

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We will maintain a 'real-time' focus on the ratio of children and young people entering our care alongside those who are leaving our care. Our priority will be to reduce demand for entry to care where there are suitable and effective alternatives for children and young people, whilst improving our permanency practice to secure a timely permanence option for the those children and young people who are in our care



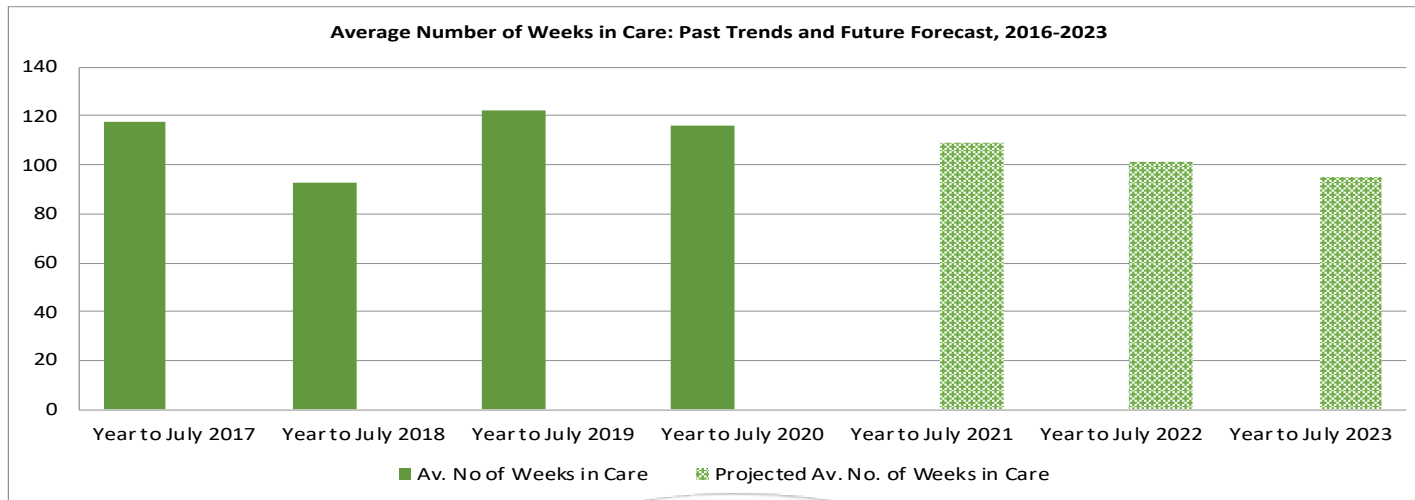
Overall placement cost will be a key proxy indicator for identifying how we can most effectively target our finite resources to secure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in our care. This will inform more detailed analysis of our overall placement spend to inform our commissioning priorities

*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

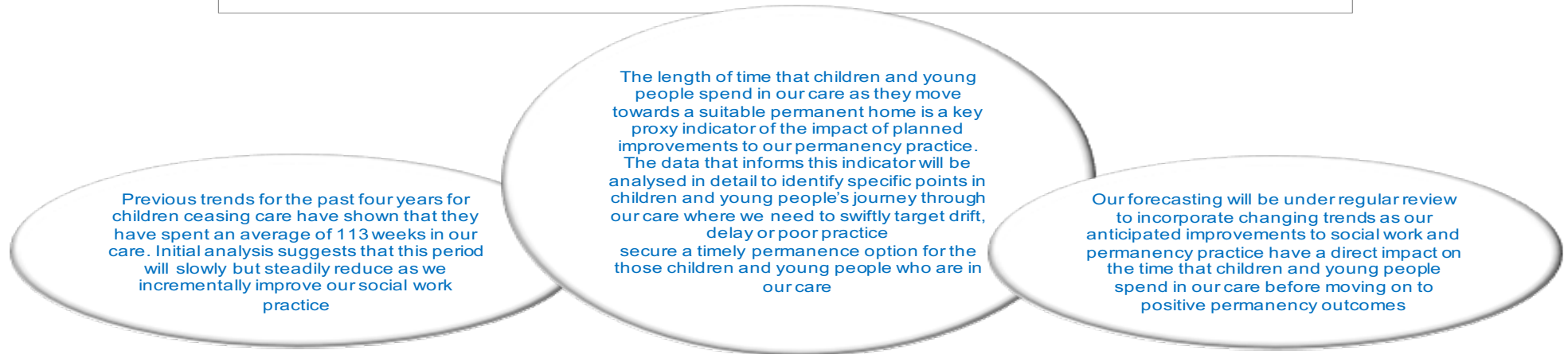


## FORECASTING DEMAND – TIME CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND IN OUR CARE

Anticipated improvements to the quality of our social work and permanency practice are key factors in forecasting overall longer-term demand.



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*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## ANTICIPATING OUR FUTURE PLACEMENT NEEDS AND DEVELOPING OUR MARKET

As part of our wider programme of improvement for children and young people in Middlesbrough we are at an early stage of transforming our approach to the way we understand and forecast demand, and the way we work with our partners and the local market to plan and commission placement capacity for children in our care. Our initial analysis, set out in this Sufficiency Plan, has clearly identified emerging themes which will drive the detailed work to be undertaken on our commissioning action plan.

As well as the headline indicators that will drive our forecasting model, the information we use to inform our decision-making is complemented by detailed ward-level data (*an example of North Ormesby analysis of children in care data is included in the separate Evidence Summary document*). This drill-down from whole-system data to a forensic analysis of individual children at ward level in our local communities offers a new and critical insight to drive our whole-system commissioning, as well as providing a more personalised focus on outcomes and impact for individual children.

We know that to achieve positive and sustainable changes to the culture and practice of our commissioning for children will require us to take steps to reframe our relationship with the local and regional placement market. Our aspiration is to look towards best practice and innovation from the sector to inform a more collaborative approach where we are in active dialogue with potential provider organisations at the earliest stages of our planning and in the development of new ideas. This reflects initial dialogue with some national provider networks where it is clear that placement sufficiency has been most effectively supported through an early and open exploratory conversation with experienced providers and regional partners.

Reflecting this shift in our approach in Middlesbrough, we are actively seeking the early engagement of potential provider organisations as we develop our Commissioning Action Plan in the autumn of 2020.

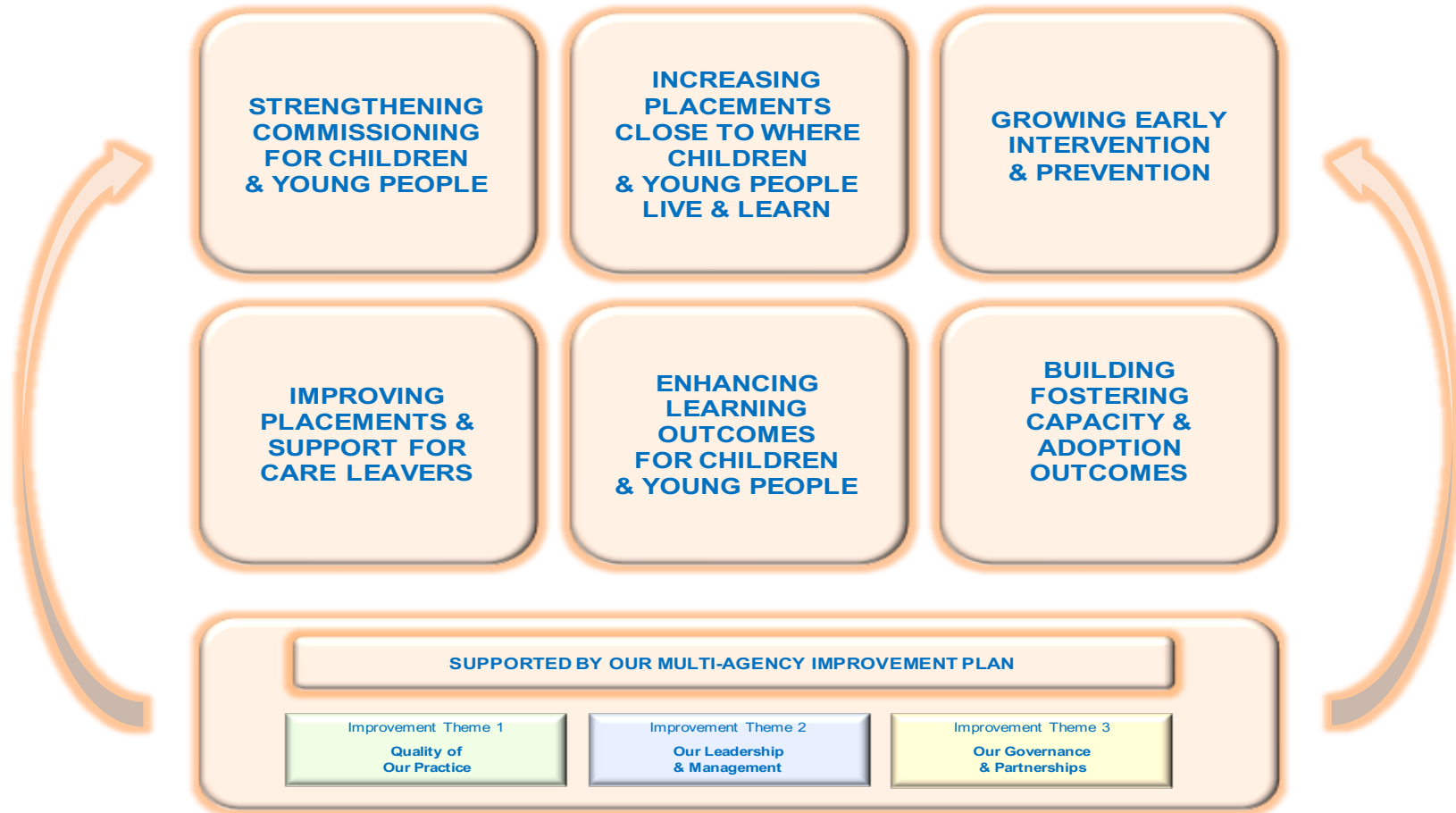
Initial development of our forecasting model has identified six themes (set out overleaf) which will provide the framework for our detailed action planning and implementation. Each priority is supported by clear impact measures. In addition to priorities that relate to our Corporate Parenting Strategy, our Sufficiency priorities also reflect wider commissioning intentions across education, early help and support for vulnerable adolescents.

Whilst the headline sufficiency and commissioning priorities are in the main predictable ones for us, the way we apply our data and local knowledge will provide a sharply focused and localised action plan which will drive our activity from the autumn of 2020. Our priorities, the actions that underpin them and the initial evaluation of impact will remain under continuous review through our governance and performance management of our new forecasting and commissioning arrangements going forward.

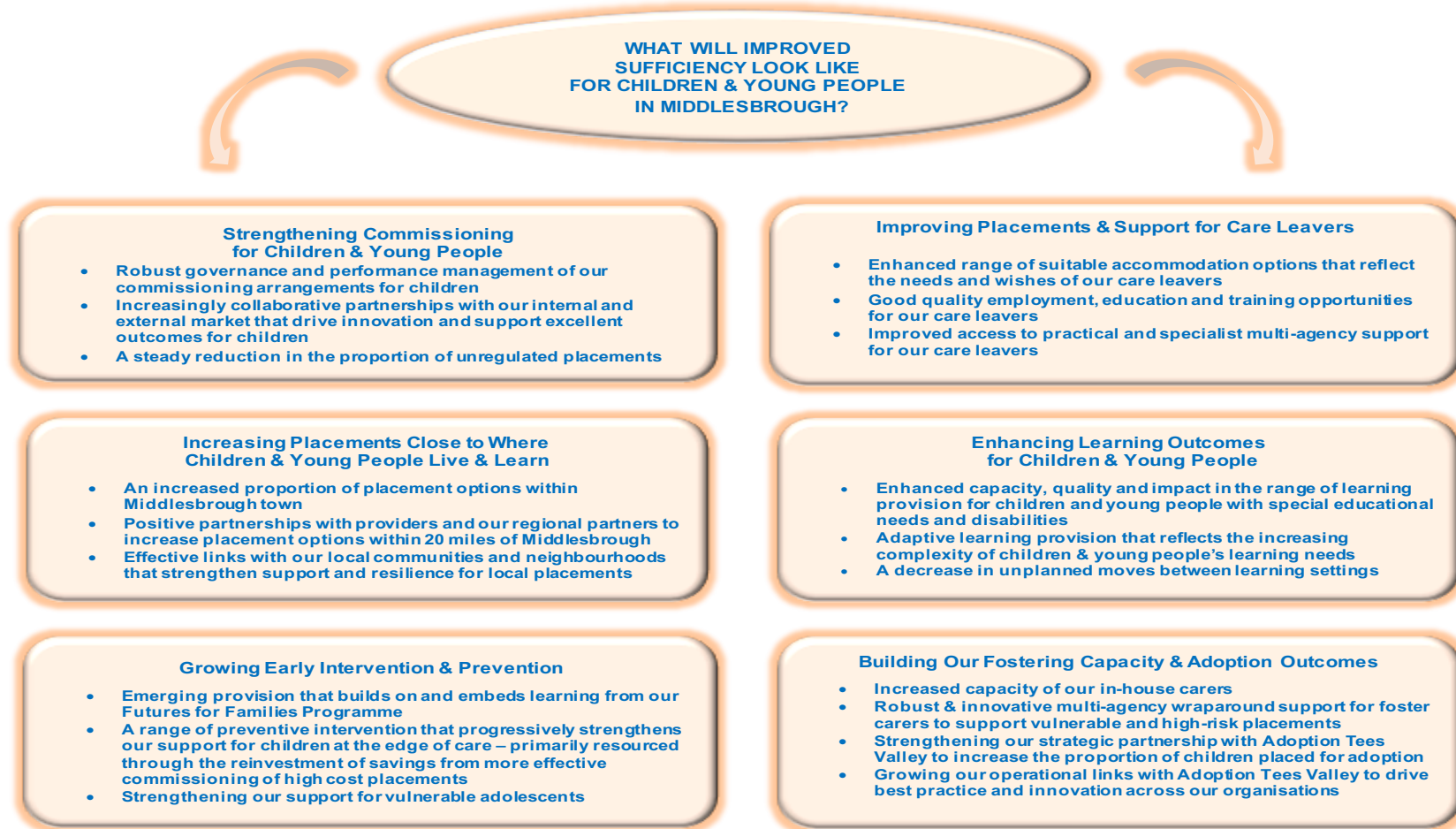
*Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data*

## OUR SUFFICIENCY PRIORITIES

Our six sufficiency priorities have been developed in close collaboration between our Children's Services operational leads and our Commissioning team, and in consultation with our Corporate Team and our Improvement Board partners. This highly collaborative approach is a significant step forward for Middlesbrough and reflects a shift in culture and approach as we focus on delivery of our Strategic Improvement Plan.



## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?



The specific actions that we need to take to deliver on these six priorities are clearly set out within our Commissioning Action Plan and are embedded within our performance management and self-evaluation framework. Our governance will provide robust oversight and challenge of the impact of our sufficiency arrangements for children and young people in Middlesbrough.

## PERFORMANCE SCORECARD FOR OUR CORPORATE PARENTING PROGRAMME (INDICATIVE AT OCT 2020)

Indicator	Measure	2020-21 Target	Middlesbrough		Against Target Trend	Direction of Travel		12 Month Trend	
			Latest #	Latest Value		Prior Month / Quarter			Polarity
						Actual	Trend		
<b>Numbers and Trends</b>									
CP1. Number of children in care in Middlesbrough	Number	618		689		691		Lower is better	
CP2. Gap between Middlesbrough and Regional CiC Rate per 10,000	Rate	84.2		93.6		Not Measured		Smaller is better	
CP3. Ratio of children entering to leaving care in last 12 months	Ratio	<1		1.8:1		1.9:1		Smaller is better	
CP4. Proportion of total CS budget spent on CiC services	%	71.8%		79.4%		71.8%		Lower is better	
CP5. FTE Caseloads between 15-20	%	44.70%		17.3%		19.7%		Higher is better	
<b>Permanency</b>									
CP6. Average number of weeks children spend in care	Weeks	132.4		140.7		139.4		Lower is better	
CP7. Number of CiC where plan of permanence has been ratified	%	95%		59.6%		52.7%		Higher is better	
CP8. Number of permanence arrangements resulting in SGO	%	20%	39	23.0%		22.0%		Higher is better	
CP9. Number of children placed with parents on care orders at home	%	5%	85	12.3%		12.9%		Lower is better	
CP10. Number of children secured in adoptive placements	%	10%	13	8.0%		7.0%		Higher is better	
CP11. Average time in days between entering care and placed in adoptive placement	Days	541		569		531		Lower is better	
<b>Sufficiency and Placements</b>									
CP12. Number of children placed outside of 20 miles of home postcode	%	15%		18.0%		17.0%		Lower is better	
CP13. Number of children placed in in-house foster placements	%	21%	131	19.0%		18.4%		Higher is better	
CP14. Number of children placed with Connected Carers	%	29%	215	31.2%		31.1%		Lower is better	
CP15. Number of children in residential placements	%	10%		11.2%		12.2%		Lower is better	
CP16. Number of children in external residential placements	%	3%		3.5%		3.8%		Lower is better	
CP17. Number of children in single placements in last 12 months	%	70%	476	69.0%		69.5%		Higher is better	
CP18. Number of Care Leavers remaining with former foster parents	%	12%	14	9.5%		10.7%		Higher is better	
CP19. Number of CiC/CL placement breakdowns in last 12 months	%	5%		2.8%		2.7%		Lower is better	
<b>Quality and Impact</b>									
CP20. Number of FFF young people who were on the edge of care and did not become Looked After	%	80%		100.0%		100.0%		Higher is better	
CP21. Number of IRO challenges resolved at Stage 1 or 2 (i.e. informally or first formal stage)	%			Awaiting Data				Higher is better	
CP22. Number of Post 16 CiC in EET	%	65%		61%		60%		Higher is better	
CP23. Number of Care Leavers in EET	%	54%		48.0%		49.0%		Higher is better	
CP24. Number of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation	%	95%		90.8%		92.6%		Higher is better	
CP25. Number of children sustained in a fragile placement where assessed as high risk of breakdown	%	80%		100.0%		100.0%		Higher is better	
CP26. Number of CiC/CL audits rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'	%	20%		0.0%		Not Measured		Higher is better	

Targets shown are for 2020-21.  
Annual 2021-22 and 2022-23 targets are currently being set. In addition there are a small number of additional quality and impact indicators that are being developed which will be added to the scorecard.

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