

## CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

<b>Date:</b> Tuesday 18th October, 2022
<b>Time:</b> 1.00 pm
<b>Venue:</b> Mandela room

### AGENDA

1. Welcome and evacuation procedure
2. Apologies for Absence  
Apologies for Absence
3. Declarations of Interest  
To receive any declarations of interest.
4. Minutes- Corporate Parenting Board- 14 September 2022 5 - 18  
The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 14 September 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.
5. HDFT Children in Care Performance Report 19 - 28  
Kelly Dunning, Named Nurse Children in Care (LAC), Harrogate and District Foundation Trust will provide information to the Board.
6. Participation of children and young people  
Kathy Peacock, Voice and Influence Manager will be in attendance to provide an update to the Board.  
Kathy will be joined by Adam Hart, CAMHS / HeadStart Business Administrator Apprentice.

7. Performance against Corporate Parenting Board Strategy
- Rachel Farnham, Director of Children’s Care will present the scorecard to the Board
- N.B The scorecard will be circulated closer to the meeting to ensure information provided is as accurate as possible.
8. Corporate Parenting Board Strategy Action Plan- Permanence 29 - 38
- Paula Jemson, Head of Looked after children and Corporate Parenting will provide the action plan regarding permanence to the Board.
9. Corporate Parenting Board Strategy Action Plan- Sufficiency 39 - 44
- Claire Walker, Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager will present the action plan regarding Sufficiency to the Board.
10. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) annual report 45 - 72
- Karen Simmons, Interim RAD manager/Practice Lead will present the Independent Reviewing officer (IRO) annual report to the Board.
11. 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  
Monday 10 October 2022

**MEMBERSHIP**

Councillors C Hobson (Chair), D Davison (Vice-Chair), B Cooper, D Coupe, A Hellaoui, T Higgins, M Saunders, Z Uddin and J Walker

**Assistance in accessing information**

**Should you have any queries on accessing the Agenda and associated information please contact Susie Blood, 01642 729645, [susie\\_blood@middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:susie_blood@middlesbrough.gov.uk)**

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**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Wednesday 14 September 2022.

- PRESENT:** Councillors C Hobson (Chair), B Cooper, D Davison (Vice-Chair), A Hellaoui, Z Uddin and D Coupe
- PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor Dodds
- ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** E Craigie (gazette)
- OFFICERS:** V Banks, S Blood, R Brown, S Butcher, X Davies, T Dunn, R Farnham, R Hamer, A Hart, L Jefferson, P Jemson, Peacock and G Nicholson
- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors T Higgins, M Saunders, J Walker, T Parkinson, P Rudd, D fenny and Dunning

22/1 **WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and a round of introductions took place.

Members observed one minute’s silence as a mark of respect following the recent death of Queen Elizabeth II.

22/2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received by Councillors Higgins, Saunders and J Walker.

22/3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

22/4 **MINUTES- CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD- 27 JULY 2022**

The minutes from the Corporate Parenting Board held on 27 July 2022 were submitted and agreed as a true record.

22/5 **OFSTED UPDATE**

Sue Butcher, Director of Children’s Services provided members of the Corporate Parenting Board with an update from the Ofsted Monitoring visit held in July 2022.

The monitoring visit was the fifth visit by Ofsted since the full inspection of Children’s Services in November/December 2019 which judged the service as inadequate overall. (Report published Jan 2020). Children’s services were give two weeks preparation and the visit took place over 2 days on 13/14<sup>th</sup> July 2022. The monitoring visit was undertaken by two inspectors and reviewed the following:

- The front door service that receives contacts and referrals
- Child protection enquiries,
- Early help assessments
- Step-up and step down to early help

The Director outlined the positives and areas that need focus for each area. However the headline findings were as follows:

Positives

- Front door services have continued to develop and improve overseen by the

#### Improvement Board

- Robust and comprehensive quality assurance programme ensures leaders have an accurate understanding of practice and its impact on children and families Expansion of the offer of early help support to vulnerable children
- Stronger and wider partnerships in the Multi agency children's hub (MACH)
  - Improving the quality of information,
  - The richness of information-sharing
  - Leading to better informed decision making.

#### Areas needing focus

- Workforce instability and increased demand in the assessment service have slowed down throughput
- Additional pressure on some social workers' caseloads and quality of practice
- Unfinished assessments and incomplete records have led to delays and risks being fully assessed for some children

The Board were advised that the areas needing focus would become part of the refreshed Children's Services Improvement Plan which was monitored on a six-weekly basis by the Multi-Agency Strategic Improvement Board (MASIB).

The most significant area of concern remained the recruitment and retention of experienced, permanent social workers as this affects all of the area needing focus as set out above. Colleagues from Human Resources are reporting to the next MASIB meeting on the continuing efforts to recruit and retain such staff. Further information on this would be brought back to the Board at a future meeting.

Next steps were as follows:

- Next monitoring visit would take place in November 2022 focusing on Care experienced young people.
- Annual engagement conversation (across children's services) in December 2022.
- Judgement inspection – possible February 2023.
- The Director lastly thanked everyone across the service for their dedication to evident that 'Middlesbrough Children matter'.

Following the presentation, the panel had a conversation regarding social workers and demand on the front door. In May and June they had been significant demand on the service in terms of children's assessments due to social workers leaving the local authority. Whilst this wasn't the case in July 2022, Ofsted were made aware of this flux in demand.

Another Board member also raised concern about potential future challenges that might hit the service as social world changes and the financial pressures. This in turn would create more demand on social workers. Whilst it was difficult to predict the future however, the service would look at current demand and look at future recruitment of social workers to try and mitigate the pressures and also continue to encourage collaborative working. The Department of Education had also provided additional funding to assist with pressure.

AGREED

That the update be noted.

The Chair welcome Kathy Peacock, Voice and Influence Manager to the meeting to provide the Board with the standard item regarding the participation

of Middlesbrough's children and young people.

The Manager firstly advised the purpose of the Team, which was to:

facilitate open, safe, and inclusive spaces for care experienced young people/adults to come together.

We provide fun activities for them to tell you what is important to them, so you can improve the support they and others receive.

The Team support

- Care experienced young people to get involved, have a voice and create events to hear from more young people/adults.
- Young people to share their views with key decision makers and professionals, who will act on what they say and positively change services to meet their needs.

**Membership of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) for 10-16 year olds. Meet fortnightly.**

- Three young people in the same foster placement
- One young person in foster care
- One young adult in supported housing (Young Leader for the group)
- One young person with SEND in a residential home (he is seen at his home to capture his views)

**Membership of the Care Leavers Forum (CLF) for 16 - 25 year olds. This will however be put on pause whilst the weekly pop up cafes take place- see below information)**

- One young adult in supported housing (same person who attends the CiCC)
- Care leaver who has a young child

Over the last 6 weeks, the Board were advised of the following activities of the Team:

Activity	Impact
Started delivering our Communication and Language training - Seven professionals attended. Two Social Workers A Personal Advisor Senior Resource Worker Deputy Manager Head of Resources ISSS Care Manager	One of the keys things the young people did was reading out statements telling Professionals what looked after young people and care leavers want (outlined within the agenda pack)
Met with Ralph Jordinson from Digiwise (Middlesbrough Council).	He listened to the young peoples' views and these will influence next steps.
Collaborated with Pathways and Middlesbrough Football Foundation and held our 'Stepping up Together' Football event on the 4th August.	31 young people joined in (including from Redcar and Cleveland). All the young people had a great time, met people and had burgers/bacon sandwich for lunch. 26 staff supported

	the event including Pathways, Middlesbrough Foundation, Digiwise team, Paula Jemson, Rob Brown and Carlos Dos Santos.
Three members of the CiCC and a member of the Middlesbrough Youth Council went to the Climate Change Conference at Redcar and Cleveland College	Young people heard about how long things take to degrade and what things we can do to save energy and save the planet.
Held a Picnic in Stewart's Park for care experienced young people. Nine young people came along. We were visited by Cllrs Barrie Cooper, Cllr Alma Hellaoui, Paula Jemson and Rachel Farnam. Two foster carers, a social worker and her dog, one support staff from Holly Lodge, a resource and two staff members from strategic services . We played games, got to know each other and chatted about being part of the CiCC. The new young people were interested in joining.	A fantastic day out.

Adam Hart, Member of the CiCC and also apprentice for the Council provided the Board with the plan for the next few months:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<p>Increase membership of the groups and hold more events –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trip to Jump 360 is booked for 5 October 2022.</li> <li>• Celebration event/party for care leavers to take place during Care Leavers Week 24-28th October.</li> <li>• Christmas party for looked after young people</li> </ul>	<p>So we have more young people plan engagement events.</p> <p>As well as having fun, ask young people what is going well for them and what they would like to change</p>
Invite other senior decision makers and Corporate Members to our groups. Look at having specialised BBOTS sessions for care experienced young people	Ensure we are being heard by decision makers and they are changing the support
Going to work on the Participation structure (adapting the idea from the Mayor) and how we have our voice heard along with other young people.	Co Produce the Participation strategy and identify what we want as care experienced young people.
Work with Pathways to deliver sessions	Make sure what is offered meets car



<p>with Care leavers to look at the Local Offer. Pop up café will be held weekly and have themed engagement activities looking at:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for Care Leavers</li> <li>• Positive Relationships - Family, friends</li> <li>• Education, Training and Employment</li> <li>• Health and Emotional Wellbeing</li> <li>• Somewhere to call home</li> <li>• Finances</li> <li>• Having and Voice and Being Heard</li> <li>• Our Rights and Responsibilities</li> </ul> <p>For those who cannot attend the café, they will be given postcards to fill in that cover all the themes. We will be offering all care leavers an incentive if they complete all the themes.</p>	<p>leavers needs.</p> <p><b>An ASK</b> During the meeting, Adam invited Corporate Parents to act as a Champion for each theme and come to the pop up café and help the care leavers make changes?</p> <p>Members of the Board were keen and volunteers were asked to contact Kathy directly.</p>
<p>Continue to deliver the Communication and Language training</p>	<p>Ensure as many Professionals as possible hear what we want.</p>
<p>Design logo's for the groups and get hoodies for them to form their group identity</p>	<p>Create an identity for our groups</p>

Following the presentation, a board member queried what support was in place for care leavers into adulthood, to which Paula Jemson, Head of looked after children and corporate parenting provided information on the transition, including where support would be provided from the Pathways Team including support for education/ health / mental health.

In terms of future engagement with care experienced young people, the Head of Assess to Education added that Secondary school Heads are fully on board so this may be a future avenue.

The officers were thanked for their presentation.

**Agreed: That the information be noted.**

22/7

#### **PERFORMANCE AGAINST CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD STRATEGY**

The Head of Looked after Children and Corporate Parenting was in attendance and provided the Board with information relating to the Corporate Parenting Board scorecard.

The Head of Service advised that the scorecard was in place for the Corporate Parenting Board to see how our performance was progressing and have the opportunity to challenge.

Key findings August 2022 were as follows:

CP1: Number of children in Care in Middlesbrough- Trend

- Number of children and young people open to social care, in particular Children looked after shows a fluctuated trend since September 2021.
- Children looked after numbers vastly improved. They dropped down below the 500 mark in January 2022, reaching 535 in August 2022- a 1% decrease prior to last month.
- Children looked after are down 1% in comparison to 12 month prior.

CP2: gap between Middlesbrough and Regional Children in Care (CiC) per 10,000- trend

- The rate of Looked after children per 10,000 shows a fluctuating trend in the last 12 months reaching the lowest rate in January 2022 at 39.91.
- The rate increased in recent months, reaching 53.49 in August 2022- still a 3% decrease in comparison to the previous month.
- Middlesbrough remain above all external benchmarks, and have fallen below our 2020/21 outturn.

CP3: Ration of children entering to leaving care- Trend

- The number of children starting a period of care remaining stable, until recent months when the ratio increased. Scorecard shows that in August 2022, for every 09. Children starting care 1 ceased. The ratio still remains below the 2020/21.

CP4: Average number of weeks children spend in care (Ceasing care in month) –Trend

- The average number of weeks children spend in care has shown a fluctuating trend in the last 12 months. The number of weeks reached in September 2021 at 249.73.
- In August 2022, the average number of weeks fell below the 2021/22 target (132.40) again, reaching 97.90.

CP8: % of permanence arrangements resulting in Special Guardianship order (SGO)- trend

- The % of permanence arrangements resulting in SGO remains above or meets the 2020/21 target, 20%, the last 12 months.
- This shows great improvements across Children's social care, with regard to the reasoning for CLA ceasing.

CP10.1: % of children who ceased to be looked after in the period, who were adopted- Trend

The % of children who ceased to be looked after during the period, who were adopted has remained relatively stable across the last 12 months.

In August 2022 the % reached 10%, a 1% decrease in comparison to last month and a 1% increase in comparison to 12 months prior.

CP9: % of CiC placed with parents on care orders at home- trend

- The number of children in care placed with parents on care orders at home exceeds the 2020/21 target (5%) across all months.
- The % slowly declined, reaching the lowest recorded in February 2022 at 7.20%. Though the % has since increased reaching 9.35% in August 2022.
- There are currently 51 children placed at home with a parent. This has increased from the lowest point in February when there were 41 children recorded as being cared for at home by a parent.
- This has reduced from an overall high of 99 children in September 2020.
- This is an overall reduction of 48.4%

CP13: % of CiC placed in in-house foster placements- 12 month trend

- The % of in-house foster carer placements has remained relatively stable in the last 12 months.
- The % remains below the 21% 2020/21 target in August 2022 reaching 19% - 0.55% in comparison to 12 month prior.

CP14: % of CiC placed with Connected Carers- 12 month trend

- The % of connected carer placements has slightly fluctuated in the last 12 months.
- The % remains below the 2020/21 target of 29% across all months recorded.
- In August 2022 the % reached 25.80%, -0.26% in comparison to 12 month prior.

Following the presentation, a board member queried whether the target of 21% for foster carers would increase? In response, the officer advised that the presentation specifically on fostering would provide further clarity of how the service was looking to increase the number of foster placements.

**AGREED- That the information be noted.**

22/8

**FOSTERING QUARTER 1**

The Head of Looked after children and Corporate Parenting Board provided the 2022-2023 quarterly report in relation to fostering in Middlesbrough for the period April- June 2022.

The Head of service provided a table with key data, including for example, number of initial enquiries, number of fostering families and information on number of children placed within in-house fostering and Independent fostering agencies (IFAs). Key statistics included, were as follows:

*Number of enquiries - Quarter 1 (22/23) 63 (28 at Quarter 4 21/22)*

*Number of initial visits – Quarter 1 (22/23) 5 (14 at Quarter 4 21/22)*

*Number of children placed in-house fostering- Quarter 1 (22/23) 191 ( 180 at quarter 4 21/22)*

*IFA – Quarter 1 (22/23) 145 (same as quarter 4 21/22)*

In terms of what was going well the Board were advised of the following:

- Middlesbrough now have the highest number of children placed with in-house fostering families.

March 2019 IFA 154 Inhouse **124 - 44%**

March 2020 IFA 160 Inhouse **158 - 50%**

March 2021 IFA 163 Inhouse **164 - 50 %**

March 2022 IFA 145 Inhouse **180- 55%**

**June 2022 IFA 145 Inhouse 191 - 57 %**

- There has been an increase in fostering enquiries due to the sustained marketing campaign; to date. Middlesbrough have received 63 enquiries which exceeds our target of 46 by the end of July 2022.
- 88% of Foster Carer reviews were held within timescales
- No connected carers assessments have gone out of the 24 week timescale
- Middlesbrough have timescales and practice guidance on connected assessments making them more robust and child-focused
- Middlesbrough have a stable team and two agency workers have now been recruited into permanent posts.
- The introduction of Birth Child, Therapeutic Parenting Support Groups, and a Men Who Foster Group are underway
- 10 workers within the team are undertaking a 12 month programme of Trauma-Informed Practice training with John Scadden.
- Trauma-Informed supervision sessions with foster carers, Children looked after social workers, and Education and supervising social workers have been introduced to support fragile placements.
- Management oversight and grip continues to increase and is supporting the improvement of practice and compliance across the service.
- The Pilot Constellation for the Mockingbird Project is in place and due to launch in September.

The Head of Service advised that there were concerns regarding the following:

- Connected Carer Referrals have increased by 33% due to influx of children coming into the care of the Local authority, which has increased workload for social worker, creating pressure on timescales and performance. This has seen a rise in 8 week extensions and tasks not completed in 16 weeks.
- While initial enquiries have increased many enquirers do not progress often choosing to progress with an Independent fostering agency (IFA ) due in part to the current financial offer.

- In June a fostering family, long-term matched with 3 Middlesbrough children, transferred to an IFA at a considerable long-term cost to the LA; in addition, another fostering family has registered their intention to transfer to an IFA to improve their financial situation.

In terms of foster carers transferring to IFAs, the Head of Service outlined that at present Middlesbrough pay newly approved carers £0 per week and a banding payment can only be awarded once carers have completed their Training Support and Development Standards, usually at the point of their first review (12 months after approval) IFA's pay a full weekly rate per child from the day of approval recognising the crucial and professional role that carers play in caring for and supporting our children looked after.

The current financial package offered by Middlesbrough cannot compete with that offered by IFA's and is hindering our campaign to recruit and retain our fostering families.

Despite this, it was encouraging to see that there is no shortage of interest in fostering, and Children's services were looking at Middlesbrough's financial offer and a report would be submitted to the Executive for formal approval later in the year.

Finally the Board were advised of the plan to increase foster carers:

- Middlesbrough aim to be able to meet the needs of 70% of our looked-after children through in-house fostering provision by the end of 2024 and need to recruit a substantial number of fostering families to achieve this.
- Middlesbrough aim to review our financial offer to foster carers in order to compete with IFA's and support our campaign to 'keep Middlesbrough children with Middlesbrough Carers'.
- We are seeking support from an agency social worker, to relieve pressure on the team and service. To continue to ensure that children's permanency under connected carers remit remains timely and robust.
- The aim is that with increased and sustained marketing activity throughout 2022 the initial enquires will increase to 200 in 2023 which should result in 20 fostering families being approved in 2023.

Following the presentation, the Chair outlined that if possible all councillors should promote fostering through their local communities and social media platforms. There was concern amongst the Board surrounding the financial offer provided by IFAs, however under the current financial situation, they could see the benefits to foster families, despite adding extra challenges on the local authority. The Director also added that the IFAs do not offer the same level of support to foster carers as the local authority so it was hoped the marketing campaign would help to raise that level of knowledge.

The Director of Children Service's also advised the Board that they had been unsuccessful in recruiting a foster carer to represent the Corporate Parenting Board, however further correspondence would be undertaken with contacts.  
AGREED- That the information be noted.

Rob Hamer, Service Manager for Future for Families was in attendance to provide the Board with a project end report.

He advised the Board that The Future for families service was within the strengthening families protecting children programme from September 2022 until August 2022. The service has now come out of the project stage and the partnership with North Yorkshire has ended.

The Manager provided information on the following:

- *Our referrals and support*

Within the 2 year pilot, the Manager advise that they had support over 100 young people. The service begin to with heavy support with outreach but this started to reduce in the summer of 2021 and the resources went to support the complex cases within the residential hub. It is proposed that the edge of care service will restart again in November 2022.

- *Our specialist support*

- Overall within the Authority there has been a 12.3% reduction in the number of missing episodes.

59% of young people supported by the service, has received some form of specialist service e.g. speech and language

- *OFSTED*

Within the 2 years, the service has been Ofsted inspected 2 times since the service was registered in August 2020. In October 2021, the service was rated good with outstanding leadership and management. In context, the service was rated the highest amongst the programme.

- *Our impact (cost avoidance)*

This tracks the cost of the child up until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The manager advised that there was an estimated cost avoidance of 56% of forecasted spend.

- *OUR young people*

The manager finally provided some facts in relation to the hub over the last 2 years, including for example:

- Future for families has supported 102 young people
  - 29 young people have accessed the HUB.
- 100% of young people accessing the hub received support from all specialist support.

The Manager also advised after a number of queries, that where possible they try to keep and support young people in Middlesbrough, as long as the support provided fits their need.

There is evidence that inhouse support is better rather than outsourcing, and therefore the fostering offer, social work and residential offer was also discussed, due to the demand for this service and referrals from the MACH.

The manager was thanked for his presentation.

AGREED- That the information be noted.

22/10

## **NOMINET DIGITAL REACH PROGRAMME**

The Chair welcome Ralph Jordinson , Risk and Resilience manager and Louise Jefferson to the meeting to provide an update on Nominet – REACH- Digiwise.

As way of background the manager advised that in March 2021, Middlesbrough Council were successful in a funding application for £36,220 which is to research, consult and produce a policy/practice document for digital safeguarding for Children Looked After and Children Leaving Care.

Funding by Parentzone and Nominet was allocated to 9 interlinked projects under 3 key areas of which Middlesbrough's sits within Design Challenge 3, that is:

*Elevating young peoples' voice to influence the services that impact on their digital safety and opportunity.*

*Care experienced young people have invaluable insight which is currently under-utilised in relation to digital and online safety policy development.*

More specifically the project was to ensure care experienced young people can influence the service policies, process and practice that impact on their digital lives. We need to extend participation; diversify and improve channels of communication and feedback.

This is based on significant risks posed to Children Looked After (CLA) being at risk of online grooming and exploitation, exposure pornography, peer pressure to send youth produced sexual imagery and access to drug sales and other harmful products usually via social media.

Since reporting at the last board meeting, the manager provided information on the progress so far;

- a) Employed and trained a care experienced apprentice training in Impact Measurement and Management.
- b) Steering group formed inclusive of young people representation and developed action plan with progress milestones. Established the project name '**Digiwise**'.
- c) Designing and implementing consultation for young people with care experience.
- d) Hosted a series of consultation workshops, focus groups and events capturing young peoples views.
- e) Consulted with 35 young people within quantitative surveys, 5 young people within qualitative 'deep dive' surveys and multiple others within focus groups and workshops. The target was 100 young people but sadly this wasn't met.
- f) Promoted recognised CPD programme of learning for foster carers, residential workers and social workers.
- g) Promoted the adoption of the UKCIS Digital Passport for children and young people in care.
- h) Developed with young people a smartphone holder for all care experienced young people with QR code for a quick and easy access to resources.

Since the last Corporate Parenting Board in February 2022 the survey has been completed and the key findings of the Digiwise project were as follows:

- Most of our young people are exposed to some form of adversity in online spaces, these issues are far reaching and usually involve social media.
- Young people want data plans and do not want data limited.
- That internet speeds are slow and could be better across all settings.
- There was limited evidence of consistent approaches and overall effectiveness of acceptable use agreements and use of online safety contracts in care homes. This is sometimes that needs to be explored further e.g a digital pledge
- Young people want quick and easy access to reporting and support mechanisms, with tools to enable their fast access when faced with crisis.
- Lack of consistent guidance on appropriate filtering on both foster home broadband, mobile phone providers and settings on applications with the concept of "safety gates" being employed.
- Educating young people through workforce development programme such as the 'Fostering Digital Skills' programme.
- That Middlesbrough need to educate young people on the risks of being online along with practical tips on how to keep social media counts safe including how to block, report and delete.

The Manager outlined that the final report will be ready in November 2022, with the Digiwise draft policy in January 2023 and completion was still on target for March 2023.

From the findings of the survey, a number of recommendations have been put forward:

- Take all necessary steps to ensure harmful content such as violent, graphic, sexual,

hateful and extremist content is minimised and filtered at source within all settings, through the use of various “safety gates” on networks and devices.

- To ensure that our workforce and professionals, carers and residential staff have the skills, knowledge and skills to support young people to gain all of the benefits to being online, whilst still managing their risk.
- Being able to offer age appropriate, high quality education, interventions and conversation starters when they are needed.
- Offer quick and easy access to resources and support for our children and young people.
- Consideration to the adoption of the governments UKCIS Digital Passport and the role it can play in building collaborative approaches to digital resilience in care between carer and child.
- The existing policy *Short breaks and residential services Wi-Fi & Internet use policy* is in place but will be reviewed in light of this research and national guidance.

The manager finally outlined that online spaces pose risks to young people just as there are risks in physical locations, these recommendations are designed to safeguard young people whilst in online spaces.

Research from Internet Matters UK shows young people who are vulnerable such as children looked after are at greater risk than their non-care experienced peers due to being more frequently withdrawn, anxious and have lower self-esteem.

In the UK, there are over 65,000 children and young people currently living in foster care with 55,000 foster families.

In Middlesbrough in May 2022 there were 618 children and young people currently living in care with 449 living within foster care, 209 of which are aged 11- 18. It was hoped that adopting the recommendations of digiwise would take those steps to further protecting are children and young people when being online.

The Board were pleased that this area was being looked at and would become policy. Clarity was also sought that all foster carers are provided with guidance on how to educate their foster children regarding using online spaces and this was the case, as all foster carers receive a foster carer handbook.

#### AGREED

- That the information on Digiwise be noted
- That the board fully endorse the recommendations devised for the Digiwise project.

22/11

#### **ADOPTION TEES VALLEY- ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chair welcome Vicky Davison – Boyd Service Manager for Adoption Tees valley (ATV) to provide an overview of the key findings and information from the annual report.

The annual report covered the period 1.4.2021- 31.3.2022.

Overall ATV has continued with slightly lower levels of adoption activity overall within this year, with numbers of children being placed with adoptive parents.

Within the Tees valley and Middlesbrough:

- Slight reduction in children referred overall  
Middlesbrough has had an increase with 61 referrals, 58 previous year
- Fewer children with an adoption plan (ADM)  
Middlesbrough has remained the same- 33 ADM each year

- Marginal reduction in Placement Orders (POs)  
Middlesbrough has had a marginal reduction 28 PO's, 30 previous year
- Fewer children placed  
Middlesbrough has increased placements with 26 placements, 24 previous year
- Fewer adoption orders granted  
Middlesbrough has had a slight decrease – 24 AO's, 25 previous year
- 1 disruption in this year- finding the right family for the child.
- 4 of the 13 children placed for adoption have been from ethnic minority background.

The Manager provided some statistics for the Tees Valley in respect to placements and placement orders as well as early permanence. The board were advised that it is a fully system change and takes a great deal of consideration before placing a child on their journey to adoption. There has been a great deal of training undertaken with local authorities and sharing good practice.

The Child's adoption journey was also shared with the Board.

In terms of timescales, there has been a real improvement and there has been a lot of work undertaken into early permanence and early family finding and supporting children in finding placements close to their home.

There has been a significant improvement in the time between starting care and moving in with adoptive parents;

- Middlesbrough 301 days , 385 previous year (target is 426 days)
- Overall ATV – 383 days, compared to 445 England average
- Significant improvement in time from Placement order to match  
Middlesbrough 189 days, 301 days previous year ( target is 121 days)
- Overall ATV – 174 c/w 198 days England Average
- On 31.3 22 only 1 child with a Placement order was not linked

In terms of National and regional trends:

- slight increase in adoption orders nationally , decrease regionally in 2021-22, c/w previous year
- Fewer placements nationally and regionally c/w 2020-21
- Fewer ADM's and PO's than previous year

The manager also referred to the somerset ruling, which had previously been discussed with the Board. The Somerset ruling was a legal case around requirements of the medical advisor in relation to ADM. It was impacted on adoption activity and ATV know that 14 children were delayed in being matched and placed due to the ruling.

In terms of adopter approvals, there have been fewer adopters approved than previous years, 46 compared to 64 previous year. Fewer people have enquired, however ATV are now seeing the longer term impact of the pandemic and there are significant delays with adopter medicals.

The Manager finally spoke around other elements of adoption work and within the annual report:

- ATV were awarded the Early Permanence Quality Mark (Coram BAAF) – one of 2 Regional adoption agencies to achieve this last year
- Secured funding for regional Early permanence Sufficiency Project
- Brought young people together to make a film around their experiences of education
- Collaborative work with the Virtual Schools- funding an Education Support worker,



and delivering education support - helping 90 children. This post has now been made permanent.

- Independent Adoption Support Audit – positive findings- more strategic work with health required.
- Under 11s group and Teenage adoption group would also be regrouping over the next few weeks.

Following the presentation, the support in place for adopted children in schools was discussed and offering advice to schools in supporting adoptive children and their families e.g. premium plus is available for adoptive children and supporting children with an ECHP. It was evident as well that not all children who are adopted are known to teachers and this should be the case.

AGREED- that the annual report be noted.

22/12

**ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

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**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL  
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**



<b>Report of:</b>	<i>Kelly Dudding, Named Nurse Children in Care HDFT</i>
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<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Board- 18 October 2022</b>
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<b>Subject:</b>	<i>HDFT Children in Care Performance Report</i>
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<b>Contribution to the guiding principles of the Corporate Parenting Strategy</b>
<b>Your Home</b>
<b>Your Family and Friends</b>
<b>Your Education</b>
<b>Your Adult Life</b>
<b>Your Health and wellbeing</b>
<b>Your Voice and Influence</b>
.

**Is the report confidential or does it contain exempt information?**

*Yes / No*

**What is the purpose of this report?**

*To share with the board the new commissioning arrangements under the Tees Valley CiC Service and to also update board with progress to date.*

**Report Background**

**Introduction**

From 01<sup>st</sup> April 2022 the responsibility of initial health assessments (IHA's) and review health assessments (RHA's) for South Tees NHS Trust was amalgamated into a Tees Valley Children in Care contract.

HDFT is responsible for the timely co-ordination of IHA's which includes gathering consent and pertinent health and social information on a child entering the care system to inform the IHA appointment. The IHA appointment is completed by the acute hospital trust and disseminated to social care.

It is the responsibility of the Tees Valley Children in Care (TV CiC) service to co-ordinate and undertake RHA's for any child in care in the borough of Middlesbrough. TV CiC practitioners will also undertake RHA's for a child placed out of area within a 30-mile radius of their home address.

The TV CiC service is comprised of the following staff:

- 0.5 WTE Band 8a Named Nurse Children in Care
- 1.0 WTE Band 7 Specialist Nurse Children in Care
- 4.1 WTE Band 6 Nurse Children in Care
- 4.1 WTE Band 5 Staff Nurse Children in Care
- 0.9 WTE Band 4 Data & Analyst Administrator
- 2.9 WTE Band 3 Administrator

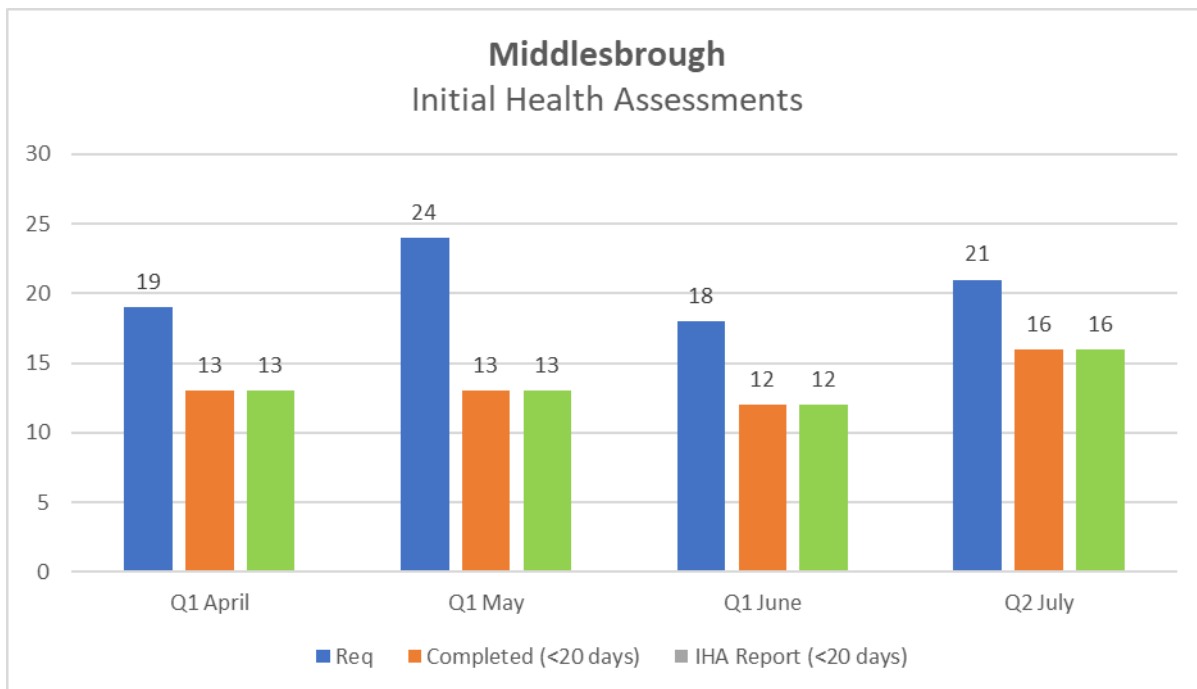
The CiC practitioners undertake RHA's with the best interests of the child at the heart of interventions. We liaise with caseload holders (Health Visitors and School Nurses) prior to and following the RHA to ensure that the assessment is informed and is a holistic approach.

### **Initial Health Assessments (IHA's)**

Since 01<sup>st</sup> April 2022 HDFT co-ordinates the completion of any Initial Health Assessments and monitors the completion and reporting of these by Community Paediatricians from South Tees NHS Trust.

Since the transfer of responsibility to HDFT we are notified by the Local Authority of a child entering the care system and we collate notification consent and book the child onto the clinic via Cammis. We notify the allocated social worker of the appointment and the social worker is responsible for notifying the parent and/or carer. All IHA assessments continue to be undertaken face to face.

The acute hospital trust is then responsible for assessing the child, completing the report and disseminating to HDFT and to the local authority.



There have been significant, ongoing challenges in relation to IHA compliance which HDFT, the local authority and the acute hospital trust recognise and are working in an attempt to rectify the situation.

All three partners meet on a weekly basis and discuss any outstanding IHA appointments, establish if additional clinic appointments are required and liaise in relation to child was not brought. HDFT have also raised with the local authority that a delay in providing notification consents is creating a delay in the child being booked to attend for an IHA.

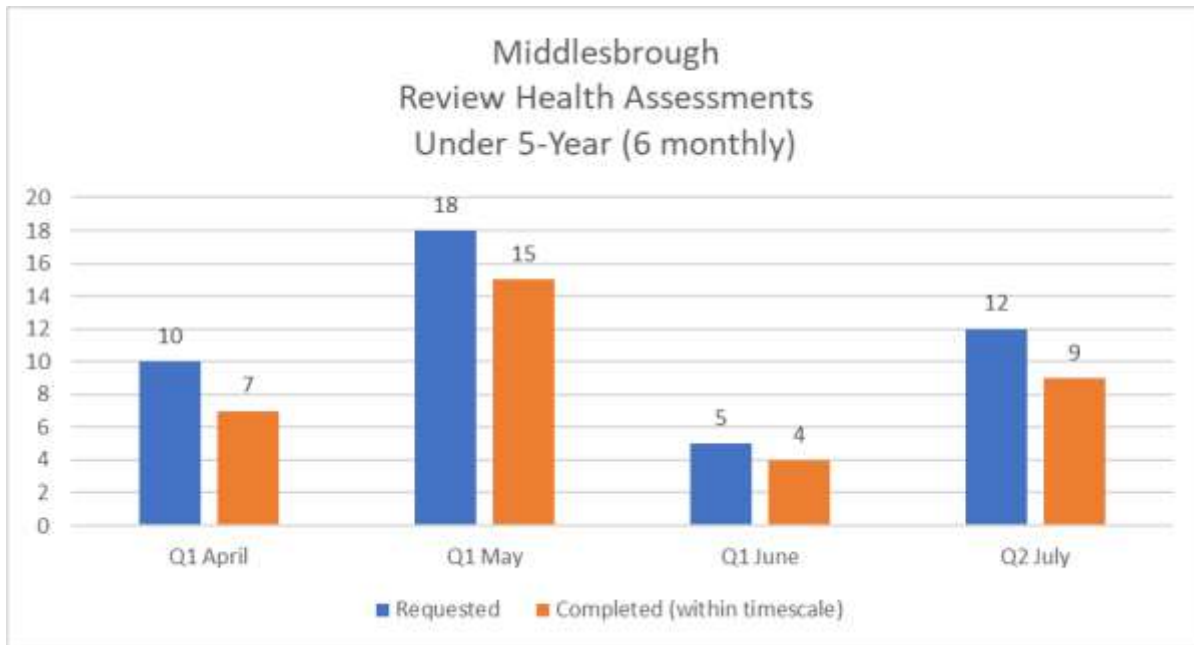
It remains the responsibility of the social worker to notify the parent / carer of the appointment details and if for whatever reason the appointment is to be cancelled / rearranged then this must be agreed by the service manager.

### **Review Health Assessments**

As per statutory guidance set out in 'Promoting the Health of Looked After Children' (DFE, DOH 2015), children in care under the age of 5-year are provided a health review twice yearly and children in care over the age of 5-year have an annual review.

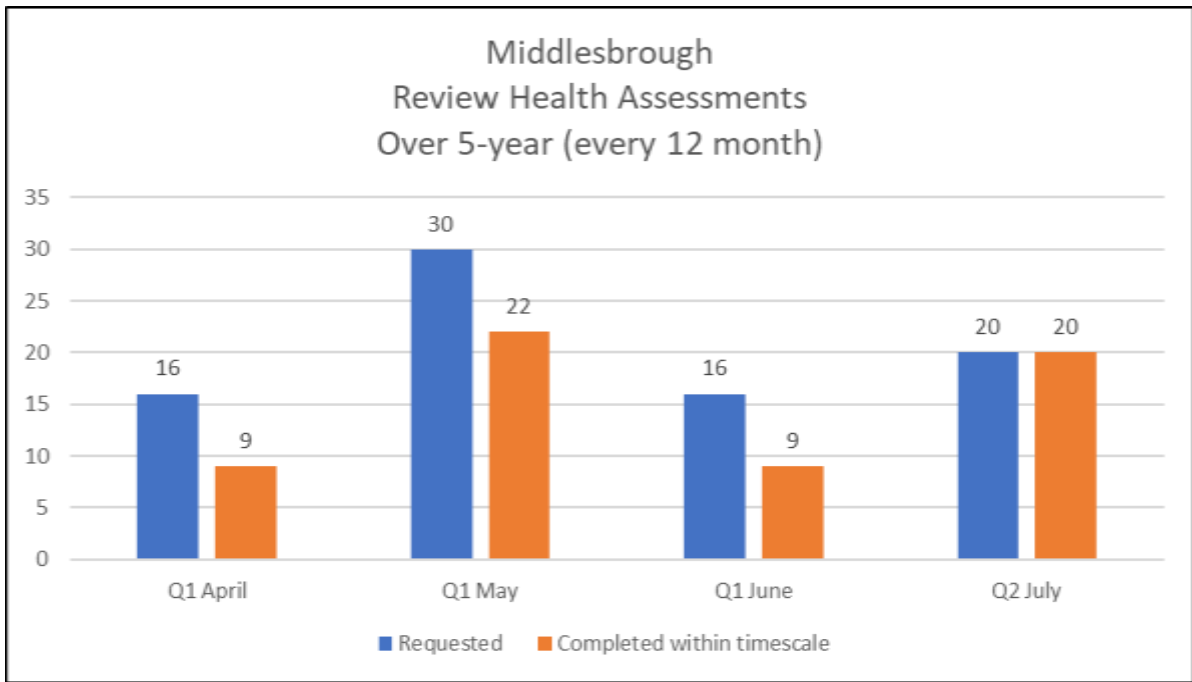
All RHA's are undertaken at a face to face contact, usually in the child's home, though HDFT have the philosophy that they will see a child in the venue of their own request.

**Compliance to Review Health Assessments (RHA) completed within the timeframe of 6 monthly for children under 5 years.**



Middlesbrough			
Under 5-Year % in timescales			
Q1 April	Q1 May	Q1 June	Q2 July
70%	83.3%	80%	75.0%

**Compliance to Review Health Assessments (RHA) completed within the timeframe of 12 monthly for children over 5-15 years.**

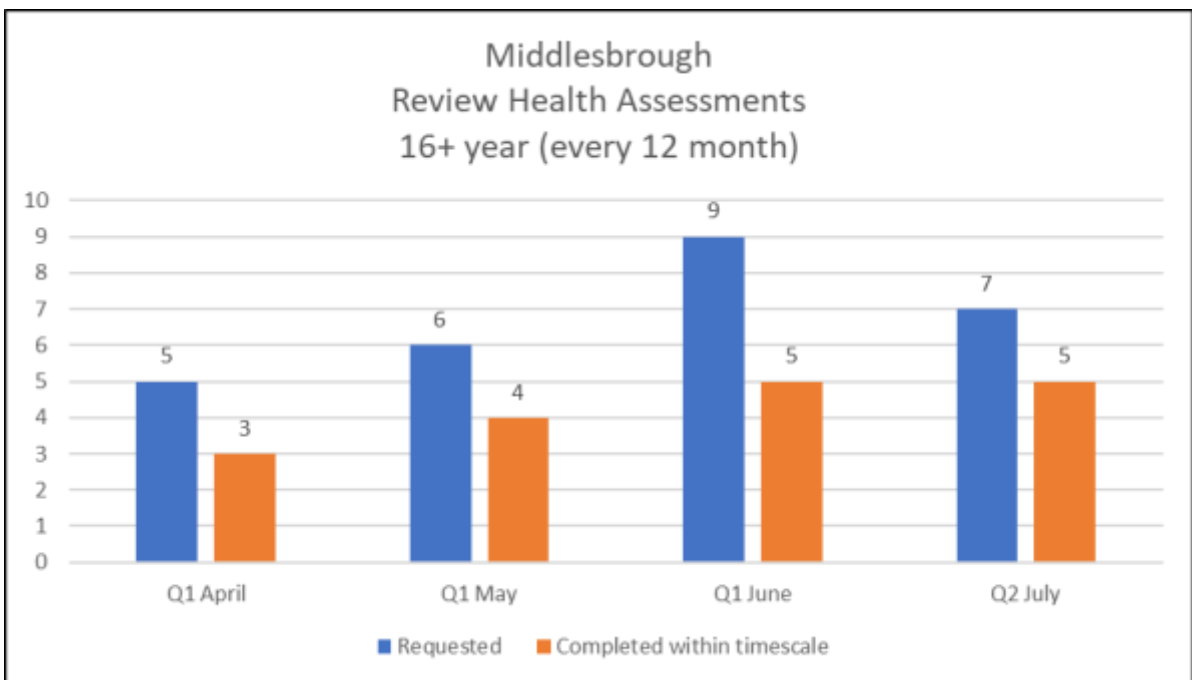


**Middlesbrough**

**5-15 year % in timescales**

Quarter	Q1 April	Q1 May	Q1 June	Q2 July
%	56.3%	73.3%	56.2%	100%

**Compliance to Review Health Assessments (RHA) completed within the timeframe of 12 monthly for children over 16+ years.**



<b>Middlesbrough</b>			
<b>16+ year % in timescales</b>			
Q1 April	Q1 May	Q1 June	Q2 July
60%	66.7%	55.6%	71.4%

Challenges that have contributed to the timely compliance being less than desirable is as follows:

- Child living out of area (beyond a 30-mile radius) and the RHA request not being undertaken within timescales.
- Placement changes for CiC and the Tees Valley CiC service not being notified of the placement change.
- Staffing capacity throughout the mobilisation of the Tees Valley CiC service.
- By request of the young person due to exams.

Progressing through mobilisation to business as usual, HDFT will be able to report on registration with a GP, dentist and subject to EHCP, as per KPI's and LQR's laid out in the service specification.

As we are all aware, there are ongoing challenges in relation to timely access of dental services, despite children subject to care orders. Prior to HDFT becoming responsible for CiC in Middlesbrough there was extensive work undertaken in relation to a Dental Health Pathway. This continues to be a work in progress and it is anticipated that it will be embedded in practice by November 2022.

In addition, HDFT have also implemented a School Based Immunisation & CiC Pathway that ensures the immunisation uptake for CiC is satisfactory. This has been devised and implemented into practice since May 2022 and as a result we have been successful in 3 CiC having their outstanding immunisations administered.



Children in Care &  
School Based Immuni:



case study -  
immunisation pathway



The TV CiC service have begun embedding monthly quality assurance processes which will identify themes and any areas of improvement. This will be addressed with practitioners through training and supervision, bespoke for CiC.

We have three monthly supervision for all practitioners in the TV CiC service; band 5's are offered a peer supervision group and band 6 & band 7 are offered supervision with a Named Nurse Safeguarding Children or Named Nurse Children in Care. HDFT also have a robust escalation process to ensure the safety and well-being of CIC. This has already been implemented on several occasions and we have been successful in professional challenge that has resulted in the placement of a family of 4 children being changed to meet their needs.

## **Summary**

HDFT were commissioned in April 2022 to co-ordinate and deliver on IHA's and RHA's. Despite the challenge that has been encountered through mobilisation we have been able to offer a service to our CIC to ensure their physical and emotional health needs are being addressed. While compliance has been below what we would expect to see, HDFT are confident that as we progress to business as usual, this will significantly increase.

## **Appendices**

N/A

## **Recommendations**

N/A

## **Why is this being recommended?**

N/A

## **Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended**

N/A

## **Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)**

N/A

## ***Legal***

N/A

**Financial**

N/A

**Policy Framework**

N/A

**Equality and Diversity**

N/A

**Risk**

N/A

**Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)**

N/A

**Background papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

**Contact:** Kelly Dudding  
**Email:** [kellydudding@nhs.net](mailto:kellydudding@nhs.net)

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# Permanence Action Plan

## Highlight Report

### September 2022



Corporate Parenting Board receive updates on a bi-monthly basis with the last update before Board in January 2022.

### 1.0 Ofsted November 2019

In November 2019 Ofsted reported that:

- Middlesbrough has a particularly high rate of children in care against national comparators, and this level was increasing.
- Children are experiencing longstanding neglect come into care too late, and decisions for them to do so are made in response to a crisis
- There are serious delays in achieving permanence for most children in care.
- Early permanence is not prioritised for children in Middlesbrough, and there is a lack of parallel planning, which creates delay in achieving stability. There are missed opportunities to place children early for fostering for adoption
- Children subject to care orders have lived at home for several years, without timely and purposeful review of whether the Care Order is still required.
- Children experience significant delay in securing permanence through adoption.
- Too many changes in social workers also affect the quality of decision-making because new workers do not know children well enough to be confident about the plans that are proposed and agree to changes at short notice.
- When children's placements become fragile, there is a lack of coordinated support for both children and their carers to prevent disruption. Some children, including very young children, have experienced too many changes in placement before their permanent placement is identified.
- Family arrangements are pursued sequentially, and for too long, when children cannot live at home.

- There are delays in securing special guardianship orders for connected carers, although the support provided to many of these arrangements is good.
- Insufficient attention is given to ensuring timely care planning, particularly for very young children.
- Senior management panels and inconsistent legal advice provide insufficient scrutiny for understanding children's experiences and to ensure that their needs are met in a timely way.

## 2.0 Our Response

The Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People in Middlesbrough was presented to and signed off by Corporate Parenting Board in December 2020.

The 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.

Our Permanency Action Plan for Children and Young People was developed in consultation with partners and is built around the six permanency priorities set out in our Corporate Parenting Strategy. The action plan defines how Children's Social Care will achieve the vision.

Our Permanency Action Plan will be systematically reviewed and updated as actions are completed, towards achievement of the priority outcomes we have identified over the 3-year cycle of our plan.

The overall responsible Council officer for the Permanency Action Plan for Children and Young People is the Director of Children's Services (DCS). For each of the six priority themes, a senior Council officer has been delegated by the DCS as the accountable lead for maintaining an overview of the priorities set out in the action plan.

### Themes and Responsible Officers

Theme		Lead Accountable Officer
1	Strengthening Permanency in Our Social Work Practice	Ben Short
2	Growing Our Multi-Agency Partnerships for Permanency	Suzanne Brennan
3	Reducing Drift and Delay for Achieving Permanency	Paula Jemson
4	Strengthening the Voice of Children and Young People in Permanency	Suzanne Brennan
5	Improving the Way we Capture and Use Our Data for Permanency	Paula Jemson
6	Supporting Permanency in Education, Employment & Training	Victoria Banks and Paula Jemson

### 3.0 Progress Against Each Theme

#### **Theme 1 - Strengthening Permanency in Our Social Work Practice**

- Practice standards and procedures for assessment practice is now revised and implemented
- Policy and procedure with regards to pre-proceedings and the use of Family Group Conferencing is now revised
- Permanency Pathway is now revised
- Updated terms of reference for Legal Gateway Panel is now in place and successfully tracks pre-proceedings and legal proceedings through to final hearing.
- New Practice model is now revised and launch to the service.
- Practice Standards for Practice Standards are in place – in the process of being reviewed
- Social Work Practice Week is scheduled for 10 October 2022
- ATV 4 training sessions planned across 22/23 to upskill social workers completing Child Permanence reports and in early permanence practice.
- Reunification process and guidance is now written
- Staff now have guidance regarding the standards of case recordings.
- Matching policy is now in place to support the practice with regards to family finding and matching of children to placements. This is supported by a matching matrix tool which assists the strengthening of decision making when considering placement options for a child



- Updated Connected Carers procedures are in place. Procedures for applications for Special Guardianship Orders are updated and will be considered for approval upon the update of the SGO financial policy.
- SGO Financial Policy is currently being updated.
- The monthly audit programme specifically focussed on the looked after and care leaving service in August and evidence improvements in practice with only 7% being judged as inadequate.

## **Theme 2 - Growing Our Multi-Agency Partnerships for Permanence**

- Permanence Monitoring Group continues to be well supported by Adoption Tees Valley and the IRO Service.
- Pre-birth protocol
- Placement Disruption Meeting procedures have been revised and relaunched
- Placement Stability procedures are in place to support children to maintain placements that are stable.
- A full review of all of the support offered to support children's emotional health has been undertaken. It is clear that there is a wide range of services available through the child's looked after plan, SEN and the Virtual School. Further work is required to develop the CAMHS offer to children in our care.
- SEN Team are developing a performance scorecard to report to the Director of Children's Care Quality and Performance Workshop on a monthly basis.

## **Theme 3 – Reducing Drift and Delay for Achieving Permanence**

- Permanency Monitoring Group continues to be well embedded and supported by the Fostering team, Review and Development Unit and Adoption Tees Valley. This is successfully tracking all children from Care Order to permanence and continues to support children to reach their forever home in a timely way.
- Permanence Planning Guidance is in place and includes all permanence pathway options including early permanence.
- Practice Standards for Special Guardianship Orders and Placements with Parents have been devised.
- Permanency Pathway is now in place identifying timescales for timely assessments and permanence planning.

#### **Theme 4 – Strengthening the Voice of Children and Young People in Permanence**

- Strengthening Practice Training was rolled out to the workforce to strengthen practice. This included a comprehensive suite of tools to support direct work.
- The workforce development programme now includes specific training regarding supporting staff to develop skills to communicate with children.
- Participation Manager is now recruited in to the service. Participation manager is responsible for the recruitment and engagement of The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum.
- The CICC/Care Leavers Forum have supported the Language that Care Practice Guidance
- The Participation Manager is currently working with the CICC/Care Leavers Forum to revise the Care Leavers Offer.
- Life Story Work training has been delivered to the workforce. Guidance for staff is in place. Resource Workers have been trained in the delivery of Lifestory work and are supporting the service to ensure that children and young people are supported to understand their journey.
- We are in the process of commissioning ARC Box, an online platform for life story work which will enhance the quality of this work and allow access to all those who are important to the child to contribute. Corporate Parenting Board may wish to see a demo of this app at a future board.
- A care experienced young person now attends Corporate Parenting Board

#### **Theme 5 – Improving the way we use and Capture Data for Permanency**

- Performance report is delivered to each Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that there is rigorous oversight and challenge.
- Permanence Tracker remains in place and is used to drive effective permanence planning.
- Legal Tracker remains in place and is effectively used to track progression of all court cases.
- An LCS pathway for Connected Carers is now in place to allow for more sophisticated performance reporting, tracking and management oversight.
- Permanence dashboard and score card is in the process of being developed to ensure that that performance reporting is improved further

## **Theme 6 – Supporting Permanence in Education, Employment and Training**

- Policy and Procedure regarding education moves is revised and embedded in practice.
- Training has been provided to staff regarding good practice practice in relation to Personal Education Plans. This will be embedded in annual training programmes.
- Designated teachers have been provided with training regarding their role in care and permanence planning.
- NEET score card has been devised and agreed. The service are working towards data reporting to include within the score card
- NEET PEPs. NEET PEPs were introduced in September 2021 to provide more focussed support for those who are not in education, employment or training or at risk of falling in to this category
- NEET task and finish group continues
- NEET Clinic remains in place, is held monthly and is supported by YOS, Virtual School, SEND, Work Readiness, Thirteen Housing and some local providers
- Designated Teachers handbook was published on 11 February 2022
- Carer and adoptive parent handbook has been published and is in place to support carers and adopters to meet the educational needs of the children they care for
- A process is now in place to fast track EHCP assessment for children in care
- The Virtual School has strong links with schools through Designated Teacher Networks

### 4.0 Impact/Performance/Data

- ✓ Overall in the lasts 12 months, the looked after populations has reduced from 544 children in August 2021 to 535 in August 2022 (1.6% reduction). There has been a 23.7% reduction in the overall numbers of looked after children since the height of 702 in September 2020.
- ✓ The rate per 10,000 has reduced from 164.2 in August 2021 to 161.5 in August 2022.
- ✓ In 21/22, 24 children secured Adoption Orders. This was significantly higher than any of the neighboring authorities.

- ✓ The average number of days our children wait between securing a Placement Order and being matched to an adoptive family has reduced for 301 days in 20/21 to 189 days 21/22
- ✓ There has been a total of 50 children secure permanence through the granting of a Special Guardianship Orders in the last 12 months.
- ✓ Connected Carers – There are currently 141 children in connected carers placements. This has reduced from a height of 212 in 2020. This is a reduction of 33.4%. The trend is showing an increase in the number of children in Connected Carers placements.
- ✓ Placement with Parents – There are currently 51 children placed with parents. This has reduced from a height of 99 children in September 2020 (48.4% reduction)
- ✓ There have been no looked after children permanently excluded from school in the last 5 years.
- ✓ There has been a 12.8% reduction in school suspension from 2019/20 to 2021/22
- ✓ Only 1.3% of looked after children are receiving less than 25 hours education (7 children). Of which there is an action plan and oversight from Virtual School with regards to each child.

## 5.0 Risks

- The increase in demand across the service and across the tees valley region
- Risks associated with the recruitment of staff in the looked after and care leaving service.

## 6.0 Next Steps

- Life Story Work compliance and quality to continue be driven
- Progress the commissioning of Arcbox to support the quality of Life Story Work
- The ongoing reduction and tracking of the number of children residing in external residential placements
- Progress the Permanence Action Plan and report to Improvement Board and Corporate Parenting Board

- Practice leads deployed in to the service to improve the quality of care plans for looked after children
- Participation People to develop attendance and provide Corporate Parenting Board with a proposed plan for the Children in Care Council.
- Recruitment of permanent staff
- Practice Week in October 2022 to support staff development

**Owner – Rachel Farnham, Middlesbrough Council, Director of Children’s Social Care**

**Author – Paula Jemson, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting**

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**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL  
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**



<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Children’s Care
<b>Submitted to:</b>	Corporate Parenting Board – 18 <sup>th</sup> October 2022
<b>Subject:</b>	Review of Sufficiency Action Plan

<b>Contribution to the guiding principles of the Corporate Parenting Strategy</b>	
<b>Your Home</b>	
<b>Your Family and Friends</b>	
<b>Your Education</b>	
<b>Your Adult Life</b>	
<b>Your Health and wellbeing</b>	
<b>Your Voice and Influence</b>	

**Is the report confidential or does it contain exempt information?** No

**What is the purpose of this report?**

To provide an update to the Corporate Parenting Board on progress made against the Sufficiency Action plan.

**Report Background**

There is a highlight report attached to this report which provides the update on work undertaken since July 2022.

**Appendices**

Appendix A – Sufficiency Action Plan Update October 2022

**Recommendations**

That the Corporate Parenting Board acknowledges the content of this report.

**Why is this being recommended?**

As this report is for information.

**Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended**

Not applicable

**Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)**

Not applicable

***Legal***

Not applicable

***Financial***

Not applicable

***Policy Framework***

Not applicable

***Equality and Diversity***

Not applicable

***Risk***

Not applicable

**Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)**

Not applicable

**Background papers**

Commissioning Action Plan – October 2022

**Contact:** Claire Walker

**Email:** [claire\\_walker@middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:claire_walker@middlesbrough.gov.uk)



# Sufficiency Action Plan

## Highlight Report

### October 2022



## 1.0 Our Response

The Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People in Middlesbrough was presented to and signed off by Corporate Parenting Board in December 2020.

The 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.

Our Sufficiency Action Plan was developed in consultation and is built around the priorities set out in our Corporate Parenting Strategy. The action plan sets out actions we feel need to be undertaken in order to better meet our needs.

Our Sufficiency Action Plan will be reviewed and updated as actions are completed or as new work is identified in the event of any changes to our sufficiency needs over the 3-year cycle of our plan.

The overall responsible Council officer for the Sufficiency Action Plan for Children and Young People is the Director of Children's Services (DCS). For each of the six priority themes, senior Council officers have been delegated by the DCS as the accountable lead for maintaining an overview of the priorities set out in the action plan.

### **Themes and Responsible Officers**

	Theme	Lead Accountable Officer
1	Strengthening Commissioning For Children & Young People	Head of Service Futures for Families Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager
2	Increasing Placements Close to where Children & Young People Live and Learn	Head of Service Future for Families Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager
3	Growing Early Intervention & Prevention	Head of Prevention Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager
4	Improving Placements & Support for Care Leavers	Head of Service Children Looked After Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager
5	Enhancing Learning Outcomes for Children & Young People	Virtual Head Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager
6	Building Our Fostering Capacity and Adoption Outcomes	Head of Service Future for Families Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager

## 2.0 Progress against Each Theme

The Commissioning Action Plan has been reviewed and updated in November 2021.

### **Theme 1 - Strengthening Commissioning for Children and Young People**

- Work continues in relation to implementation of Controcc for children and offer of Supplier Incentive Programme (SIP) for providers.
- A Market Engagement Plan is still in development and the aim is to get this presented to Children's DMT in February 2023.

### **Theme 2 – Increasing Placements Close to where Children and Young People live and learn**

- The market is developing locally and work is ongoing in order to understand opportunities for the Council in relation to commissioning these local beds to meet need and reduce the need for external out of area placements.
- There are a range of options being consider in order to increase bed availability and business case development is underway and will be presented for approval through our governance routes.

### **Theme 3 – Growing Early Intervention & Prevention**

- PAUSE continues to deliver and the region is now reviewing our future commissioning intentions as the contract is due to end in 2023.

### **Theme 4 – Improving Placements & Support for Care Leavers**

- Daniel Court continues to be well occupied and effectively supporting our young people with support needs to move into independence.
- There is an opportunity we have just identified in order to further increase our 16+ support bed numbers internally and a business case is being developed to understand the savings and benefits this could offer. There is clear evidence that more provision is needed as we still have 17 placements commissioned externally of which the majority could have been placed in Daniel Court if a bed had been available.
- We continue to awaiting further guidance on the new requirements from Ofsted for unregulated provision moving forward.

### **Theme 5 – Enhancing Learning Outcomes for Children & Young People**

- Work continues on the free school application but the residential element is no longer being progressed as the age range being proposed did not require this type of accommodation.

- SEND review continues and sufficiency of placements is a work stream of that work.
- The commissioning of additional capacity of Alternative Provision (AP) is continues with new provision planning to open over the next year to meet increase in demand.

### **Theme 6 – Building Our Fostering Capacity and Adoption Outcomes**

- Unfortunately since the last report we have sadly seen a decrease in our In-House foster placement numbers from 190 to 162. Whilst we continue to have more in-house (162 52%) placements than IFA (150 48%) placements this decrease is significant. Whilst turnover is anticipated we have sadly seen a number of carers leave in-house and move to IFA carers which not only reduces capacity in-house but is also more expensive.
- In light of the above work is underway an Executive report is being drafted in order to seek approval for an Invest to Save opportunity focusing on stabilising the in-house service, avoid more carers leaving to register with IFAs and potentially increase recruitment.
- Recruitment campaigns continue to be run and promoted locally.

### 3.0 Impact/Performance/Data

- Weekly reporting on residential placement activity continues and is providing greater level of data on placement changes and needs.

### 4.0 Risks

- Recruitment continues to be a national issue in a number of areas and work to ensure levels of staffing both internally and externally continue.
- Agency staff are being utilised and work to improve recruitment is ongoing.

### 5.0 Next Steps

- A full refresh of the Commissioning Action plan is needed and will be completed by end of October 2022.

**Owner – Rachel Farnham, Middlesbrough Council, Director of Children’s Social Care**

**Author – Claire Walker, Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager**

<b>Report of:</b>	Karen Simmons, Interim RAD Manager/Practice Lead
<b>Submitted to:</b>	Corporate Parenting Board 18 <sup>th</sup> October 2022
<b>Subject:</b>	Independent Reviewing Officers 2021/22

<b>Contribution to the guiding principles of the Corporate Parenting Strategy</b>
<p>This report relates to the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers in their dual role as Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers for children who are looked after. The guiding principles below apply in relation to children who have a child protection plan and remain at home and also children and young people cared for by Middlesbrough Borough Council.</p> <p><b>Your Home</b></p> <p>Supporting and safeguarding children and young people in their own homes when safe to do so. For those children and for children and young people cared for by the local authority, making sure that their home arrangement is safe, secure and encourages them to flourish.</p> <p><b>Your Family and Friends</b></p> <p>Working to support families to stay together and build their networks within their extended families, with friends and within their communities. For children and young people who are cared for by Middlesbrough Borough Council, making sure that family time and relationships with family members and significant people are promoted</p> <p><b>Your Education, Your Adult life, Your Health and Wellbeing</b></p> <p>Making sure that plans and arrangements for children actively promote their educational potential and provide the building blocks to support children and young people to grow up to be healthy, emotionally secure and thrive in their adult life.</p> <p><b>Your Voice and Influence</b></p> <p>Actively listening to children and young people so their voices and views shape the services they receive.</p>

**Is the report confidential or does it contain exempt information?**

No

**What is the purpose of this report?**

To provide members of the Corporate Parenting Board with the Annual Independent Reviewing Officers' Report 2021/22

## Report Background

### Context

This report covers the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. It provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).

The report is a statutory requirement under *Section 7, paragraph 11 of the IRO Handbook*, which sets out that the manager of the IRO Service must provide an annual report on the delivery of the IRO Service which can then be scrutinised by members of the Corporate Parenting Board. It provides information on the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and their contribution to improving outcomes for children in care and young people leaving care.

In Middlesbrough, the IROs have a dual role and therefore this report includes consideration of those children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

In summary the purpose of an IRO is to:-

- Monitor the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands
- Offer a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them;
- Promote the child's voice

### Progress

#### Children in our Care

OFSTED's Monitoring Visit of March 2022 regarding planning and decision making for children in care reported that:-

- *There is an improved oversight of independent reviewing officers. Mid-point reviews between the IRO and the social worker keep plans on track. Children know their IRO and are visited by them before their review. This is ensuring that children's views are known and are informing care planning.*

This view is confirmed by our own oversight of IRO practice through performance and quality assurance activity which indicates improvements in practice for IROs over 2021/22.

There were improvements in the timeliness of Reviews for children in our care with 82% in time compared to 65% in 2020/21.

There was an increase in children and young people being seen and spoken to prior to their review by their IRO (68% of reviews, a 25% increase on 2020/21)

There was cumulative evidence through increased visits and midway reviews of a 52% increase of the IRO footprint on the child's record compared with 2020/21

Use of IRO challenge through the Issues Resolution Process was sustained over 2021/22 with 80 challenges made to make sure plans for children in our care meet their needs

## **Child Protection**

Over 2021/22 There were improvements in the timescales for child protection conferences with 83% of initial child protection conference in time compared to 65% in 2020/21 and 78% of child protection plans being reviewed in time compared to 69% in 2020/21

The evidence of IRO oversight including use of midway reviews, on case records improved by 20% since last year.

IROs raised 70 issues regarding children subject to child protection plans to make sure they received an appropriate response to their needs

## **Areas for Improvement**

The IRO improvement journey will remain closely linked to the Children's Services' Improvement Plan and our priorities for 2022/23 are to make sure that practice across the Team is consistently of a high standard.

This includes:-

- Improve compliance with key performance indicators Increase child participation in meetings about them, including use of advocacy
- Strengthen the IRO engagement with children through visits and regular contact between reviews
- Gather the views of parents and carers regarding their experience of conferences and reviews
- Embedded use of Mid-way reviews to drive planning for children
- increased continuous oversight for those children without stability and permanence
- Strengthen the impact of IRO Challenge and demonstrate IROs have high aspirations for Middlesbrough children
- IROs contribute to the overall practice priorities of Children's Services by monitoring quality of performance and informing learning and development.

## **Appendices**

The Independent Reviewing Officers' Report for 2021/22 is appended to this covering report.

## **Recommendations**

That the Corporate Parenting Board notes the areas of improvement and those for further development outlined in the Independent Reviewing Officers' Report for 2021/22.

## **Why is this being recommended?**

This is recommended so that members of the Corporate Parenting Board are kept fully apprised of the progress being made by Children's Services and the particular areas needing focus.

## **Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended**

N/A

## **Impact of recommended decision**

No specific impact from noting the report.

N/A in the context of noting this report.

## ***Financial***

N/A in the context of noting this report

## ***Policy Framework***

N/A in the context of noting this report

## ***Equality and Diversity***

N/A in the context of noting the report

## ***Risk***

N/A in the context of noting the report

## **Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)**

The Service Plan for the Independent Reviewing Officers will remain closely linked to the Children's Services' Improvement Plan which continues to be monitored by MASIB

## **Background papers**

None

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# Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2021/22

**Date:** October 2022

**Author:** Karen Simmons, Gail Johnson & Gemma Maile,  
Review & Development Management Team



### **Purpose of the Annual Report**

This report covers the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. It provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).

The report is a statutory requirement under *Section 7, paragraph 11 of the IRO Handbook*, which sets out that the manager of the IRO Service must provide an annual report on the delivery of the IRO Service, which can then be scrutinised by members of the Corporate Parenting Board. It provides information on the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and their contribution to improving outcomes for children in care and young people leaving care.

In Middlesbrough, the IROs have a dual role and therefore this report includes consideration of those children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

### **Legal Context and Statutory Function of the Independent Reviewing Officer**

The appointment by the Local Authority of an IRO is a statutory requirement of the Local Authority. The statutory duties of the IRO are set out in Section 25B (1) Children Act 1989 which are to:-

- Monitor the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- Participate in any review of the child's case;
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- Perform any other function which is prescribed in Care Planning Regulations.

There are two clear and separate aspects of the function of an IRO:

1. Chairing the child's review; and
2. Monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.

The IRO handbook sets out the statutory roles and duties as well as the strategic and managerial responsibilities of Local Authorities in establishing an effective IRO service.

In summary the IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including;

- Promoting the voice of the child;
- Ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;
- Making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;
- Offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them;
- Monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands

#### *IRO Handbook paragraph 2.4*

All IROs within Middlesbrough are employed in a dual role. In addition to being Independent Reviewing Officers for children and young people in care, they also have responsibility for the role of Independent Chair at Child Protection Conferences. The benefit of combining the two roles means that there is a greater level of consistency and oversight for those children and young people who transition from Child Protection and become children in our care. These children and young people can then benefit from continued relationships with Independent Reviewing Officers who know them to support improved outcomes for them irrespective of a child's status.

#### **Independent Reviewing Officers**

The IROs are co-located in the Review and Development Team (RAD Team). The Team comprises of 14 FTE Independent Reviewing Officers, overseen by 2 Team Managers. The Team has a wealth of skills and expertise from experience within Safeguarding Care Planning, Children in Care, Early Help, substance misuse, exploitation and children with disabilities. The range of skills within the Team are complementary and fosters a culture of learning and development.

The Team has developed specialisms including IROs for children in care who are 16 plus and also to undertake reviews of foster carers.

From 2019 to 2021, caseloads for the IROs increased from 70 to 114 children each. Statutory guidance recommends caseloads for Independent Reviewing Officers of approximately 70 children. Over 2021/22 to promote good practice, additional resources have been temporarily provided to the Team through an additional 3 agency IROs. This has resulted in caseloads reducing over the year to an average of approximately 75 children per IRO.

The Team has remained stable, with most of the IROs having been in post for over 5 years and they are well established in their roles.

The position of the Team in the Children's Directorate structure has remained the same throughout 2021/22. The Team have direct access to the Director of Children's Services (DCS), Sue Butcher, and meet with her on a regular basis to share their insight into the challenges and improvements in practice and plans for children.

To provide assurance, the IRO Team report progress to the monthly Quality and Performance Clinic chaired by the Director of Children's Care.

The Team also contribute to a range of Panels which provide senior management oversight of planning for children. These include:-

- Legal Gateway Panel
- Permanency Monitoring Group
- Pre-birth Panel

### **What OFSTED have told us about the role of the IROs**

OFSTED's Monitoring Visit of March 2022 regarding planning and decision making for children in care reported that:-

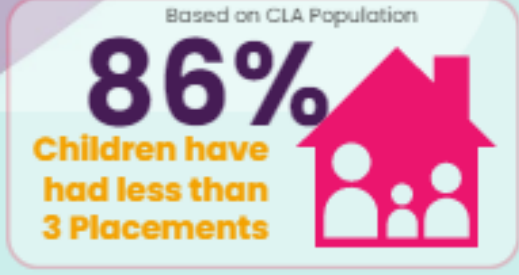
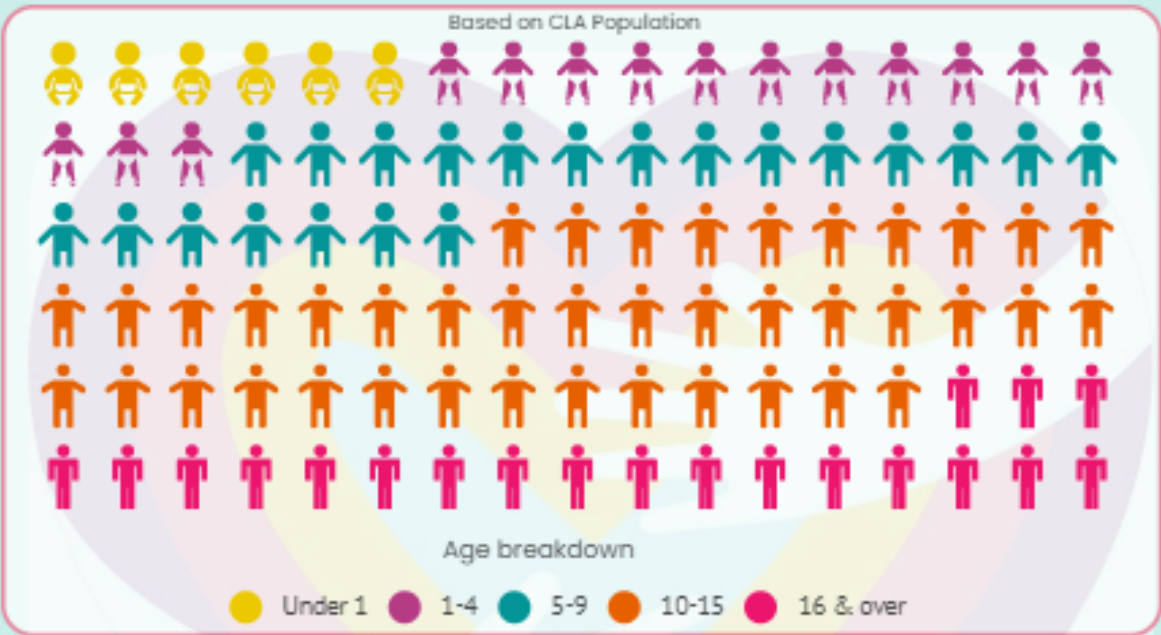
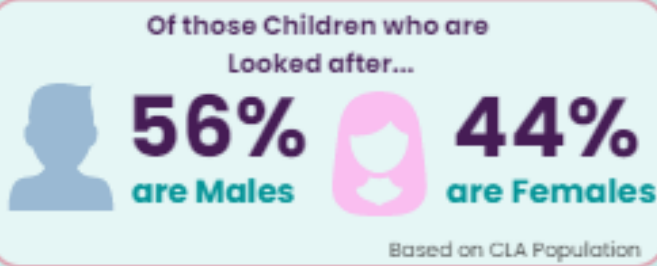
*'There is an improved oversight of independent reviewing officers. Mid-point reviews between the IRO and the social worker keep plans on track. Children know their IRO and are visited by them before their review. This is ensuring that children's views are known and are informing care planning.'*

This view is confirmed by our own oversight of IRO practice through performance and quality assurance activity which indicates improvements in practice over 2021/22.

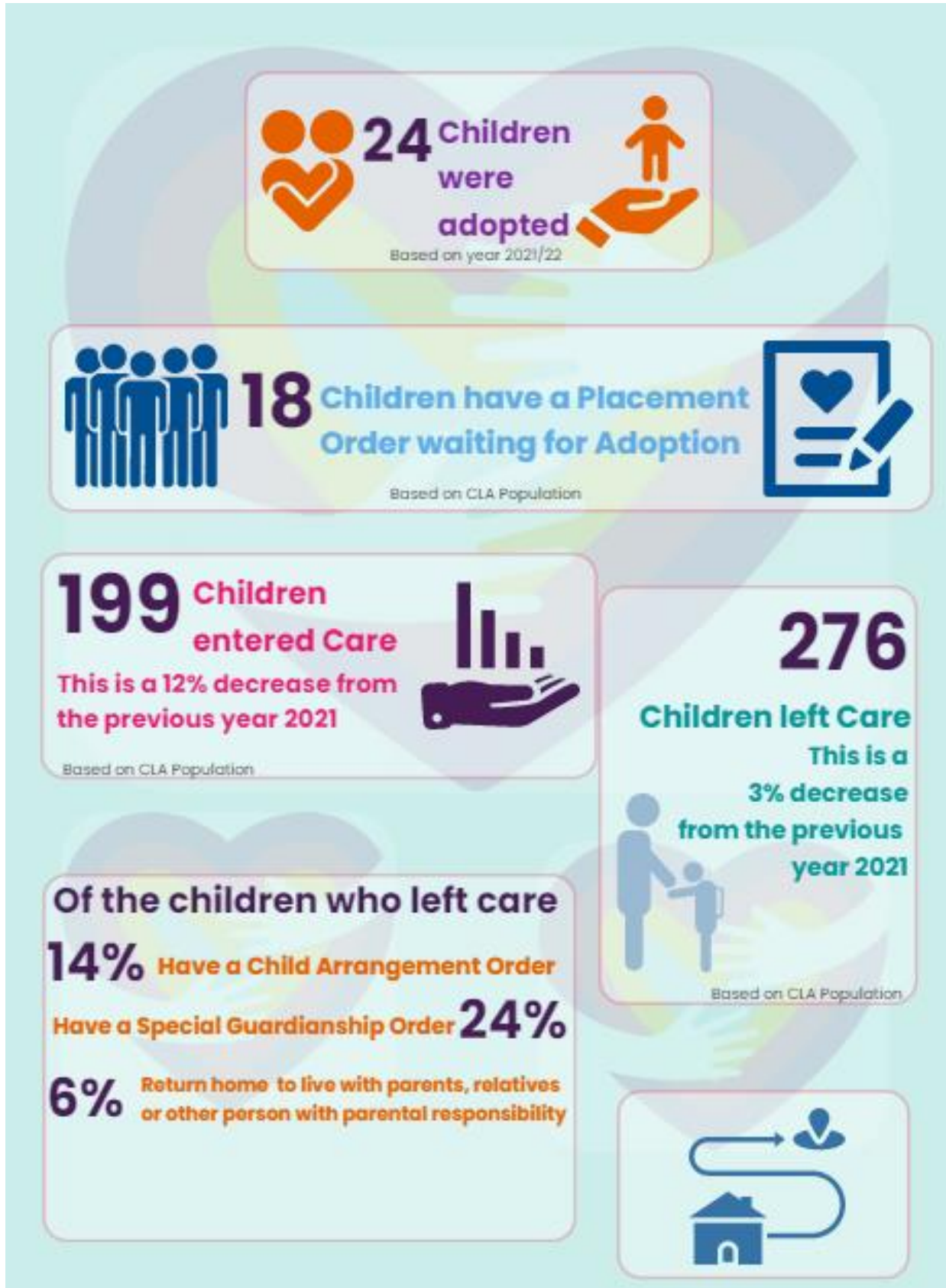
## **MEET CHILDREN IN OUR CARE**

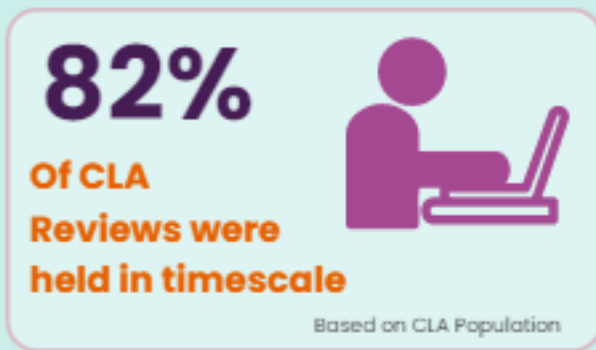


If Middlesbrough was a village of 100, 2 children would be in our care...









### **Key Messages about Children in our Care**

If you are a child in our care, you are more likely to be male (56%), than female and White British, although there are more children from minority ethnic communities entering our care in the past year (+2.1%).

It is more likely you will be cared for by foster carers and have had less than 3 home moves (87%), and you are likely to have lived in your home for over 2 years (52%). There's a likelihood that you will continue to live in Middlesbrough (almost 50%), but for some (21%) you will live over 20 miles from home.

273 children left our care in 2021/22. When you leave care, it is likely you now live with parents or extended family (24% Special Guardianship Order, 14% Child Arrangements Order, 6% home with parents or another person with/without PR). Increasing numbers of children, 9% were adopted over the year and 3.4% of children have a Placement Order and are waiting to be matched.

When your care plan is being reviewed you are more likely to send your views through another person or in writing (44%) than you are to attend in person. If you don't feel able to share your views yourself, you might have an advocate to help you (5%). To help you prepare for your review your IRO may visit or call you (68% of reviews, a 25% increase on 2020/21) to encourage you to be part of the process and capture your views.

Your reviews should be either 3 or 6-monthly and most are on time (82%, and increase if 7% on 2020/21), our target is 95%.

### **How the IROs provide quality assurance**

If you are a child in our care, your IRO is responsible for quality assurance, which means checking that you have had a say in your plan, making sure you get the right support that meets your needs, and that there is an accurate record of everything that happens.

Independent Reviewing Officers will look at your records, visit you and speak to your parents and carers. They also speak to your social worker between Reviews to make

sure your plan is right for you. The cumulative evidence of IRO oversight including visits and midway reviews, on your case records has improved by 52% since last year.

IROs also complete a 'Monitoring Tool'. These are saved on your record and if your IRO has any worries they will use this tool to share with your Social Worker and their Manager so that things can be resolved for you. The Monitoring Tool is being used more often but not yet 100% of the time. The areas IROs have raised are about reports to reviews being late or about visits to you.

When there is a delay or the outcomes we are hoping for are not always achieved for you, the IROs role is to challenge when this happens, In Middlesbrough this is called 'Issues Resolution Process'.

IROs raised 88 challenges last year on behalf of children in our care, most of these were about drift and delay (42%), Some were raised because the plan was not appropriate (26%) and the rest were due to things like; concerns they found when completing the IRO Monitoring Tool, or life story work was not completed. The IRO will monitor the response to their challenge to make sure it is resolved and in a timely way.

### **Learning from Disruption Meetings**

Where there are concerns for the stability of a long term home of a child who is looked after, this should be identified and addressed at an early stage by the relevant professionals with a Stability Meeting which will put in place some actions to help to maintain the child in their home where it is the right thing for the child. These Stability Meetings are chaired by the Team Manager for the child.

A Disruption Meeting must be held for a child whose long-term home ends abruptly or in an unplanned way. These meeting is chaired by an IRO. The meeting focuses on the needs of the child and help the child and carers to move on while also informing future planning, particularly with a view to securing permanency for the child by preventing any future breakdowns. 13 Disruption Meetings were held throughout 2021/22. The children concerned spanned a range of ages from 4 years to 16 years

- For 10 of the children they were not suitably matched to their carer given their needs.

- The necessary therapeutic support was not put in place for 23% (3) children.
- An Advocate was not offered for 23% (3) children
- For a further 23% (3) children their wishes and feelings were not evident or captured through direct work tools and their life story work had not yet been completed.
- Training was not available to support foster carers meet the specific needs of 31% of (4) children
- For some children, 31% (4), family time plans were not clear and Family Group Conferencing did not progress.
- A consistent theme was that the majority of children would have benefitted from monthly care team meetings where the plan was robustly reviewed and progress explored.

During 2021/22 work has been undertaken to strengthen the arrangements of matching of children to their foster carers in a timely way and to increase the support to children and their carers through use of care team meetings and stability meetings.

### **What We Want to Improve for Children in Care**

We want children to be safe and secure and happy where they are living. This means that children have plans of permanence as early as possible, and are part of developing their own plan. IROs must make sure that children's views are always meaningfully considered and that where children are willing/able to, they attend their review and co-chair.

We want all children to be seen before their review by their IRO, as well as keeping in touch between reviews to make sure that children and young people benefit from having a relationship with their IRO. For children who are not living in their forever home, this should be more often so that the IRO knows that the plan for the child is progressing, and if it's not, then this can be addressed as soon as possible.

We want IROs to raise issues (using the Issues Resolution Process) when there are concerns about the timeliness and quality of all plans for children, this includes care plans for permanence, EHCPs, PEPs and Health plans. In order to do this we want IROs to always carry out IRO Monitoring Tools as part of each review process. We

want these tools to make a difference for each child individually, and collectively be used to raise areas of good practice, or areas of improvement.

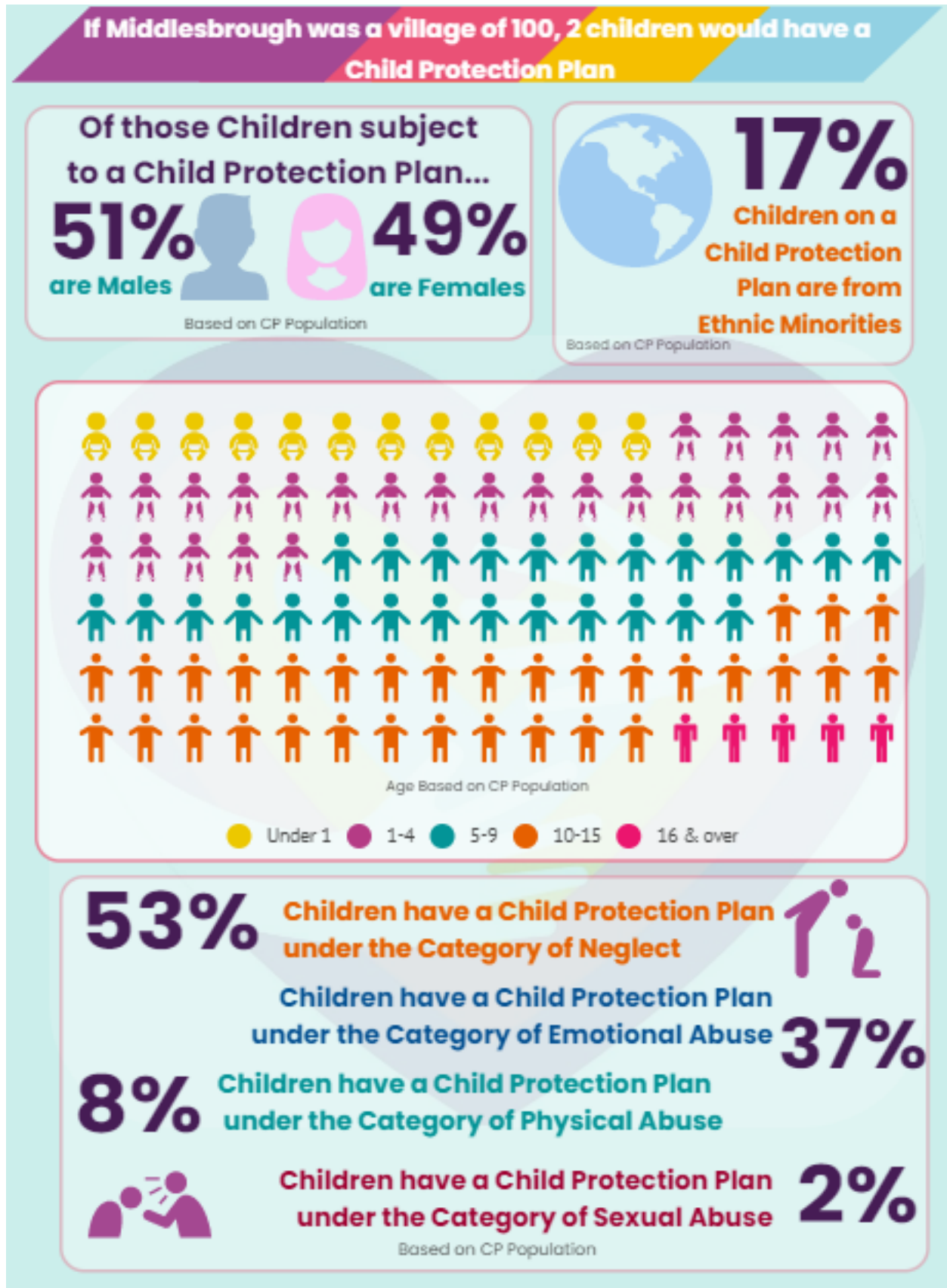
IROs will be working on making sure everyone who cares for you and works with you has high aspirations for you. This means that they will recommend plans for you that are specific to your needs with clear timescales about when things should happen.

**What have children and young people told us about the IRO service?**


‘You came across as a good and thorough professional who cares about children and gave full answers’ - *CHILD*




**MEET CHILDREN WITH A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN**




**20%** Children have had more than 1 Child Protection Plan Based on CP Population





**83%** Children had their ICPC in timescale




**78%** Children had their RCPC in timescale Based on CP Population




**2%** Children have been on a Child Protection Plan for over 2 years Based on CP Population

**528 ICPCs & 300 RCPCs** were held between **2021 - 2022**





Based on CP Population





### **Key Messages about our Children with a Child Protection Plan over 2021/22**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the number of children with a child protection plan in Middlesbrough has reduced from 567 to 416 children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. If you are a child in Middlesbrough with a child protection plan, you are more likely to be male than female (51%). You are likely to be White British, however 17% of children are from ethnic minorities.

You are most likely to be at risk of or suffering neglect (53%) or emotional abuse (37%). You are less likely to have a child protection plan because of physical (8%) or sexual abuse (2%). If you are 1 of 100 children who have had a child protection plan, it is possible that you have experienced 1 or more child protection plans (20%). Your child protection plan should not last more than 2 years (2% have).

Your Child Protection conference, where the decision is made whether you are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, should take place within 15-days of the decision being made to investigate harm. This has improved over 2021/22 with 83% of initial child protection conference happening in time. Once you have a child protection plan, it needs to be reviewed regularly. This has also improved with 78% of child protection plans being reviewed in time.

We know that we need to make child protection conferences accessible for children and young people who would benefit from being there and promote use of advocacy to support children's participation.

### **Quality Assurance for Child Protection**

If you are a child living in Middlesbrough and you have a child protection plan, your Child Protection Chair (CP Chair/IRO) is also responsible for quality assurance. Independent Reviewing Officers review your records, and speak to your parents and carers before conferences. They also speak to your social worker between conferences to make sure your plan is right for you. The evidence of IRO oversight including use of midway reviews, on your case records has improved by 20% since last year.

IROs also complete a 'Monitoring Tool'. These are saved on your record and if your conference chair has any worries they will use this tool to share with your Social Worker and their Manager so that things can be resolved for you.

The Monitoring Tool has told us when your initial child protection conferences were held out of timescales, this was often because of 'staffing' issues, such as IRO, Social Worker or minute taker absence. To make sure that no child's conference is held late, if it can be avoided, all decisions to re-arrange conferences are made by Heads of Service. We found that the contribution of multi-agency partners through written reports was evident for most conferences. The IROs also found that your views were not always clear in all conferences and you are not always being asked if you would like an advocate (NYAS).

When IROs are worried about children with a child protection plan they can raise the issue through the same Issues Resolution Process that we use for children in our care. Over 2021/22 there were 70 issues raised by IROs. On most occasions this was due to their concern about plans for children, on some this is due to procedures not being followed or that reports had not been presented to conference in a timely way.

### **What we want to improve for our Children with a Child Protection Plan**

We want all children to have a child protection conference in timescales, unless there is exceptional circumstances (so 95% of the time). When the conference takes place, we want everyone to feel properly prepared, particularly parents and the child. We want children to feel able to attend and speak at their conference, but if this isn't possible we want to make sure that children's views are gathered by professionals or an advocate and meaningfully contribute to the conference.

We want to make sure that between conferences your conference chair continues to check on the progress of plans, and if there is any worries about the plan not achieving the agreed outcomes, then the IRO will swiftly raise an issue. It's important this is done in a constructive way as a critical friend, working with the Social Worker and other professionals to address issues as early as possible for children. This will include making sure that Core Group Meetings happen regularly.

We want children to have child protection plans that make a positive difference with pace. This means we will have less children with plans that last over 15-months. We want less children to have more than 1 child protection plan. Middlesbrough aims to have children on a protection plan for as short a time as possible as targeted interventions should be effective in reducing the risk of significant harm and protecting the child.

We want to capture the voice of the child and support children to contribute to child protection conferences where appropriate.

### **Challenge Clinics**

To monitor progress for children with a protection plan we have continued to hold regular Challenge Clinics with oversight from Senior Managers. There has been some success in this approach as it has allowed a clear focus on certain cohorts of children to address their needs and help us to understand any patterns in practice that we might need to change. We have particularly focused on;

- Child protection plans for children which have lasted over 12 months and also those over 2 years
- Children who have experienced more than 1 child protection plan.

### **What are the current trends?**

- There was a decrease in number of children subject to a child protection plan
- As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the majority of plans (83%) had been in place for less than 12 months
- 9% had been in place for over 18 months
- 2% had been in place for over 2-years

### **Findings**

- Strategy meetings are well attended by partners in the vast majority of cases.
- There is a tendency to enter Section 47 for some children more nuanced decision making around assessment may have been appropriate

- There are still some older children being made subject to a CP plan (aged 16 plus)
- There was some evidence of reluctance by partners to end the plan
- Direction from the Challenge Clinic in a number of cases for the Single Assessment to be updated to reflect current risk and determine if a child protection plan is still required.

Actions for individual children are overseen by the Head Service and wider learning to support practice improvement is disseminated through the Principal Social Worker's 'Learning Meeting'.

### **Feedback from Parents and Carers**

"I am so grateful that E has yourself in her corner, hopefully things might finally change."

"Thank you, I really do appreciate your support, it just proves my point that I feel like everything is a battle and with you been back a week and having your emails things actually happen."

"Thank you for listening"

"You are the only person who has allowed me to be vocal in meetings. Thank you for that"

### **What is Audit telling us about the Role of the IRO?**

Through the Audit to Excellence programme, 111 audits were completed over 2021/22 where the role of the IRO in planning for children was considered. Of these 111 audits, the contribution of the IRO was evaluated as Good in 35% of audits Requires Improvement in 56% of audits and Inadequate in 9% of audits.

Where IRO practice was seen to be strong there was clear evidence of the IRO knowing the child well, with robust IRO oversight on the child's record through with timely reviews, child focused plans, IRO visits to the child and midway meetings taking place to monitor arrangements for children.

For those audits where the IRO's practice was not assessed to be Good, there were examples where there was limited evidence of the IRO's footprint on the child's record, some instances of children not being visited prior to their Review or a lack of evidence of proactive IRO challenge to delays for children on the child's record .

In response to these findings, and to embed consistency of practice across the Team, we have implemented Practice Standards for IROs to work to and are working to a Team Plan to support IRO development. The outcome of audits regarding IRO practice is regularly monitored by the monthly Quality and Performance Clinic chaired by the Director of Children's Care.

### **What IRO Challenge tells us about the Experience of Children?**

Over 2021/22, 158 IRO challenges were raised compared 198 in 2021/22. The majority, 86% were resolved within the 20 day timescale and at lower level, with only 10% requiring escalation to a Head of Service. No challenges were required to be raised at Director level or to CAFCASS.

The most common reason for IRO challenge is to address delay for children. This encompasses a range of issues from delay in providing a service to a child that is outlined on their Child Protection Plan or delay in achieving a plan of permanence for children in our care. Concerns about drift and delay resulted in 43% all IRO challenges.

IROs have also raised challenges where they consider that the plan for a child is not meeting their needs. This accounted for 26% of IRO challenges.

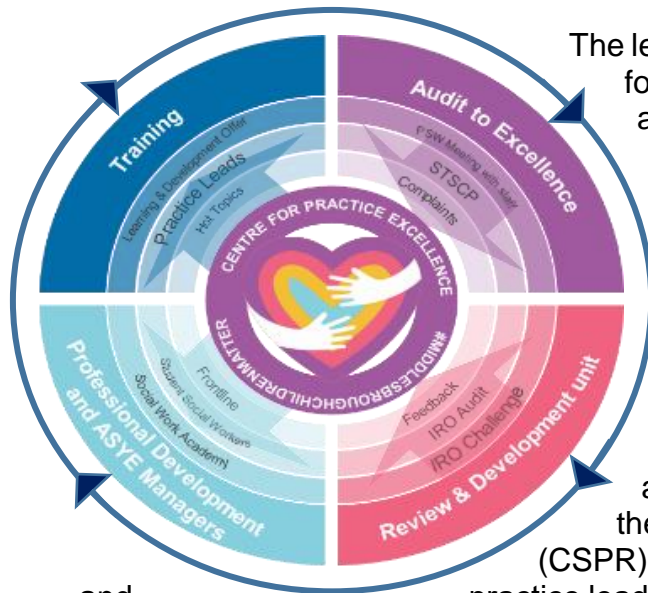
IRO challenge have been raised when procedures are not followed, such as the regularity of multi-agency meetings. Other, less common reasons for raising challenge are concerns about a child's placement (home) or where reports have not been available for Reviews or Conferences.

### **The Learning Loop**

Following an IRO Audit or issue being raised through the Issues Resolution Process, the agreed actions/issues are recorded on the child's file and where appropriate a plan

of action is agreed with the child’s social worker and Team Manager to address the issues. When this is not achieved, the issue is escalated to a senior level.

**Whole Service Learning**



The learning from all of the audits and issues raised formally through the Issues Resolution Process are analysed on a monthly basis by the IRO Team Managers. This allows us to understand themes arising from practice that need to be addressed with the whole service rather than on an individual level. The monthly analysis is shared at Director’s Quality and Performance Clinics and the Principal Social Worker’s ‘Learning Meeting’. The purpose of the Learning Meeting is to bring together learning from all areas of service including audit, complaints, the South Tees Safeguarding Partnership (CSPR) and ensure that we have targeted training practice lead support in for our staff in Children’s Services.

**An Example where the impact of an IRO challenge made a difference**

The IRO raised a challenge because she felt that an issue of potential Honour Based Violence had been overlooked. Following the challenge, mother and baby were supported to move initially to a refuge and are now living in a safe place. The court made a Finding of Fact that mother had been subject to Honour Based Violence by baby’s father and his wider family and as a result the court directed that they were not to have contact with mother and the baby.

In response to the learning from this case, we have revised our procedures and practice standards and provided briefings to staff regarding Honour Based Violence.

**Partnership Working**

Partnership working is critical to the function of the Review and Development Unit. In order to strengthen relationships across the Partnership the Service Manager for the Review and Development Unit chairs a Safeguarding Networking Forum. The aim of

this group is to bring partners together at an operational level, to share information, discuss service updates, identify any barriers to good practice and address these together.

As well as working with local Partners, the Review and Development Unit has strong links with the 12 authorities in the North East. There is a shared work plan to promote the development of IRO practice with joint training.

### **Feedback from Partners**

“IROs are welcoming and encourage appropriate professional challenge to ensure the best interests of the child and families are met.” - Police

“The IRO was gentle, calm, kind and measured with the family. She was reassuring whilst being completely direct, to the point, and honest about concerns when parents challenged them”. - Health professional

“I would also extend my gratitude to the Independent Reviewing Officer who has been integral to the children`s care plans and has been very responsive throughout proceedings. “ - Children`s Guardian within proceedings

### **Conclusion**

The Independent Reviewing Officers maintain their focus on the children and families of Middlesbrough and are committed to making a difference for them. 2021/22 has seen improvements in the timeliness of child protection conferences and reviews for children in our care to progress planning for children. There is increased evidence of IRO oversight of children`s plans through midway reviews and IRO visits to children. IRO challenge has been sustained to improve arrangements for individual children and young people.

These areas remain priorities moving forward to 2022/23 so that practice across the Team is consistently of a high standard.



The IRO improvement journey will remain closely linked to the Children's Services' Improvement Plan and our priorities for 2022/23 are to;

- Improve compliance with key performance indicators (ICPC, RCPC, CLA Review timeliness)
- Increase child participation in meetings about them, including use of advocacy
- Strengthen the IRO engagement with children through visits and regular contact between reviews
- Gather the views of parents and carers regarding their experience of conferences and reviews
- Mid-way reviews are embedded and drive planning for children
- increased continuous oversight for those without stability and permanence
- Increased scrutiny and challenge from when permanence is not achieved in a timely way
- Strengthen the impact of IRO Challenge and demonstrate IROs have high aspirations for Middlesbrough children
- IROs contribute to the overall practice priorities of Children's Services by monitoring quality of performance and informing learning and development.