

Permanence Action Plan Highlight Report January 2022



Corporate Parenting Board received a full update in August 2021 with updates against all areas of the Permanence Action Plan. This report should be read in conjunction with that report and provides an update of progress since August 2021.

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	Siobhan Davies
3	Reducing Drift and Delay for Achieving Permanency	Paula Jemson
4	Strengthening the Voice of Children and Young People in Permanency	Siobhan Davies
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

- Permanency Pathway is developed and signed off
- Legal Gateway Panel is embedded
- A Legal Gateway Tracker is in place to progress and track care proceedings
- Strengthening Practice are in the process of delivering a comprehensive Permanence training programme to the workforce
- Permanence Month delivered updates procedures and internal practice guidance to staff
- Procedures for all permanence practice and pathways are being updated and relaunched and in various stages of completion
- A Workforce Recruitment Strategy has been approved and recruitment of staff is ongoing with a new offer to experienced staff
- Practice standards for Placements with Parents have been developed with staff
- Practice standards for Connected Carers have been developed
- A working party has been launched to enhance procedures regarding reunification to put a focus on reunification as a central part of sufficiency, recognising that children are best placed at home where it is safe to do so.

Theme 2 - Growing Our Multi-Agency Partnerships for Permanence

- Permanence Monitoring Group is attended by Adoption Tees Valley Service Manager.
- Strengthened reviewing processes and senior management oversight of the education of all looked after children to ensure that there is a reduction in fixed term exclusions, children accessing less than 25 hours of education and in unregistered educational provisions. This includes the SEN team, the Virtual School, Inclusion team, Early Years and Primary Inclusion team.
- Multi agency audit of Education and Health Care Plans has been conducted with lessons learnt informing improvements.
- North Yorkshire, as Partners in Practice, are supporting to develop audit work within the fostering service.

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
- The commissioned social work team remains in place to support children to achieve permanence in a timely manner. This has developed on to a model including the support of practice development across the service.

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

- Life Story work training took place in October 2021.
- Commissioned Service is in place to develop participation for looked after children and throughout the council – Participation People. The team will consider how young people are involved in changes to policy and practice.
- Recruitment for the Children in Care Council is ongoing
- A care experienced young person now attends Corporate Parenting Board
- ATV have recruited additional staff to ensure that Life Story Work is completed and in place for children who are adopted.
- Care experienced young people delivered a workshop to Corporate Parenting Board regarding communication.
- A number care experienced young person participated in The Big Take Over and were involved in projects to improve services.
- 26 Resource workers and 10 residential staff have been trained in Life Story work.

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
- LCS transformation programme is developing a pathway for Connected Carers and Special Guardianship Orders 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

- Virtual School and Social Care delivered joint Hot Topic sessions to staff in October 2021 regarding joint working and the effective use of Personal Education Plans.
- Training scheduled for Designated Teachers in October regarding the role of education as Corporate Parents.
- Strengthened joint working with the Virtual School has led to weekly reviews of children absent from school alongside health and social care.

4.0 Impact/Performance/Data

- ✓ Overall in the last 12 months, the looked after populations has reduced from 654 children in November 2020 to 526 in November 2021 (19.5% reduction). There has been a 25% reduction in the overall numbers of looked after children since the height of 702 in September 2020. In the last 12 months 205 children started to be looked after compared to 344 children ceased to be looked after.
- ✓ The rate per 10,000 has reduced from 197.4 in November 2020 to 158.8 in November 2021. This is the lowest rate in the last 12 months and has continued to reduce consistently.
- ✓ Since 01 April 2021 19 Adoption Orders have been secured. This includes:
 - 4 children of BAME
 - 4 sibling groups of 2

- 2 aged 4+

- ✓ More children have been adopted in Middlesbrough than all other authorities in Teesside.
- ✓ The number of days between a Placement Order being granted and a child being adopted has reduced from 558 in 2019/20 to 342 in 2021/22.
- ✓ There are currently a further 38 children progressing to adoption with Placement Orders. Of which only 2 children do not have confirmed links.
- ✓ There has been a total of 76 children secure permanence through the granting of a Special Guardianship Orders in the last 12 months.
- ✓ Connected Carers – There are currently 124 children in connected carers placements. This has reduced from a height of 212 in 2020.
- ✓ Placement with Parents – There are currently 47 children placed with parents. This has reduced from 52 children in October 2021 and from a height of 99 children in September 2020 to 58 in August 2021. (52.5% reduction)
- ✓ There has been a reduction in the number of children in external residential placements from 74 in June 2021 to 47 in December 2021.
- ✓ School attendance for looked after children was 91% in November 2021.
- ✓ There have been no looked after children permanently excluded from school in the last 5 years.
- ✓ Only 3.1% of looked after children are receiving less than 25 hours education (11 children). Of which there is an action plan and oversight from Virtual School of each.

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

- Data Team to develop a Permanence Dashboard and Score Card – Performance and progress to be reported to Improvement Board and Corporate Parenting Board
- Life Story Work compliance and quality to continue be driven
- 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.
- The Audit to Excellence team will carry out a deep dive audit of the looked after and care leavers service in January 2022. Audit findings to be reported back to Corporate Parenting Board.
- Recruitment of permanent staff

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