

# Permanence Action Plan Highlight Report March 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	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 in place and is regularly communicated to staff.
- Legal Gateway Panel is embedded and work has been underway to strengthen the recording of management oversight and rationale to fully evidence decision making.
- A Legal Gateway Tracker is in place to progress and track care proceedings. Regular analysis is undertaken to understand the trends.
- Strengthening Practice are delivering a comprehensive Permanence training programme to the workforce. Some final sessions are yet to take place. Practice Leads will then support ongoing learning with staff.
- Hot topic sessions continue to be scheduled to regularly update the staff on any developments with permanence work.
- Berri has been commissioned to support children's emotional health issues. It is an online assessment tool that will be used to inform assessments and care plans and will consider mental health, behaviour, emotional well-being, relationships, risk and attachment. Since February we have completed 81 Berri tools and are using the outcomes to support next steps for children.
- Revised practice standards for Care Leavers have been launched within the Pathways Service.
- A Workforce Recruitment Strategy is in place and recruitment of staff is ongoing with a new offer to experienced staff.

- We have recruited 3 permanent social workers to the CLA service who commence posts in April 2022.
- There has been a full review of the CLA service by Audit to Excellence in January and February. This has evidenced significantly reduced levels of inadequacy and improved levels of good audits.
- 87.5% of children consulted in the audit process said their lives had got better as a result of having a social worker. 12.5% of children said their lives had stayed the same.
- We are very excited about Practice Week 2022 (March 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>). This will have a focus on language, communication and identity which will support our social workers practice around children who are care experienced.

## **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.
- Strengthened reviewing processes and senior management oversight of the education of all looked after children continues 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.
- North Yorkshire, as Partners in Practice have concluded the audit work in the fostering service and concluded that decision making in respect of Reg 24 Connected Carers is strong.
- 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.
- The commissioned social work team remains in place to support children to achieve permanence in a timely manner. The team also supports practice development across the service.

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

- 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.
- 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
- Care experienced young people delivered a workshop to Corporate Parenting Board regarding their journeys and experiences which was well received by Members.
- A Care Leavers event was held in February which was very well attended by young people celebrated the achievements of the young people. This was attended by Cllr Hobson as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board. The organisation of the event was supported by two care experienced young people.
- A children in care residential event took place in early March which was a great success. This involved children from a number of different Local Authorities.
- Evidence from January and February audit activity in the service demonstrated that direct work, life story work and/ or plans to progress this is increasingly evident on children's records. Further work is required to ensure that what children are telling us is linked to assessments to inform decision making. Audit tells us that social workers and personal advisors know their children well.

#### **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.
- Annual training plan for Designated Teachers
- Strengthened joint working with the Virtual School has led to weekly reviews of children absent from school alongside health and social care.
- National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) Virtual School peer review September 2021. An action plan is in place to take forward learning and improvements.
- University mentor Scheme commenced this term and provides support from university students for year 10 and year 11 children in our care. To improve educational outcomes and raise aspirations for our young people
- DFE post 16 pilot commenced and is in place from September 2021 to March 2022. We successfully made a bid for additional funding to support post 16 outcomes.
- 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
- Virtual School Annual conference took place on 11 February 2022
- 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 last 12 months, the looked after populations has reduced from 586 children in February 2021 to 503 in February 2022 (14% reduction). There has been a 28.3% 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 176.9 in February 2021 to 151.8 in February 2022. The gap is closing on our statistical neighbour position (134.4)
- ✓ Since 01 April 2021 24 Adoption Orders have been secured. This includes:
  - 4 children of BAME
  - 4 sibling groups of 2
  - 2 aged 4+
  - 1 child with significant health needs
- ✓ There are currently a further 36 children progressing to adoption with Placement Orders. Of which only 1 child does not have a confirmed link.
- ✓ There has been a total of 64 children secure permanence through the granting of a Special Guardianship Orders in the last 12 months.
- ✓ Connected Carers – There are currently 109 children in connected carers placements. This has reduced from a height of 212 in 2020.
- ✓ Placement with Parents – There are currently 41 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. (58.5% reduction)
- ✓ There have been no looked after children permanently excluded from school in the last 5 years.
- ✓ There has been a 128% reduction in school suspension from 2019/20 to 2021/22
- ✓ Only 1.7% of looked after children are receiving less than 25 hours education (9 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 March 2022 to support staff development

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

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