

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

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