

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

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

2020-2023



MIDDLESBROUGH
CHILDREN
MATTER

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

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

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



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A Comprehensive Evidence Summary Document of supporting data and information is available separately – please request via email from:
corporateparentconsult@middlesbrough.gov.uk

An Important Message About Language ...

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



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WELCOME TO OUR CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

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

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

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

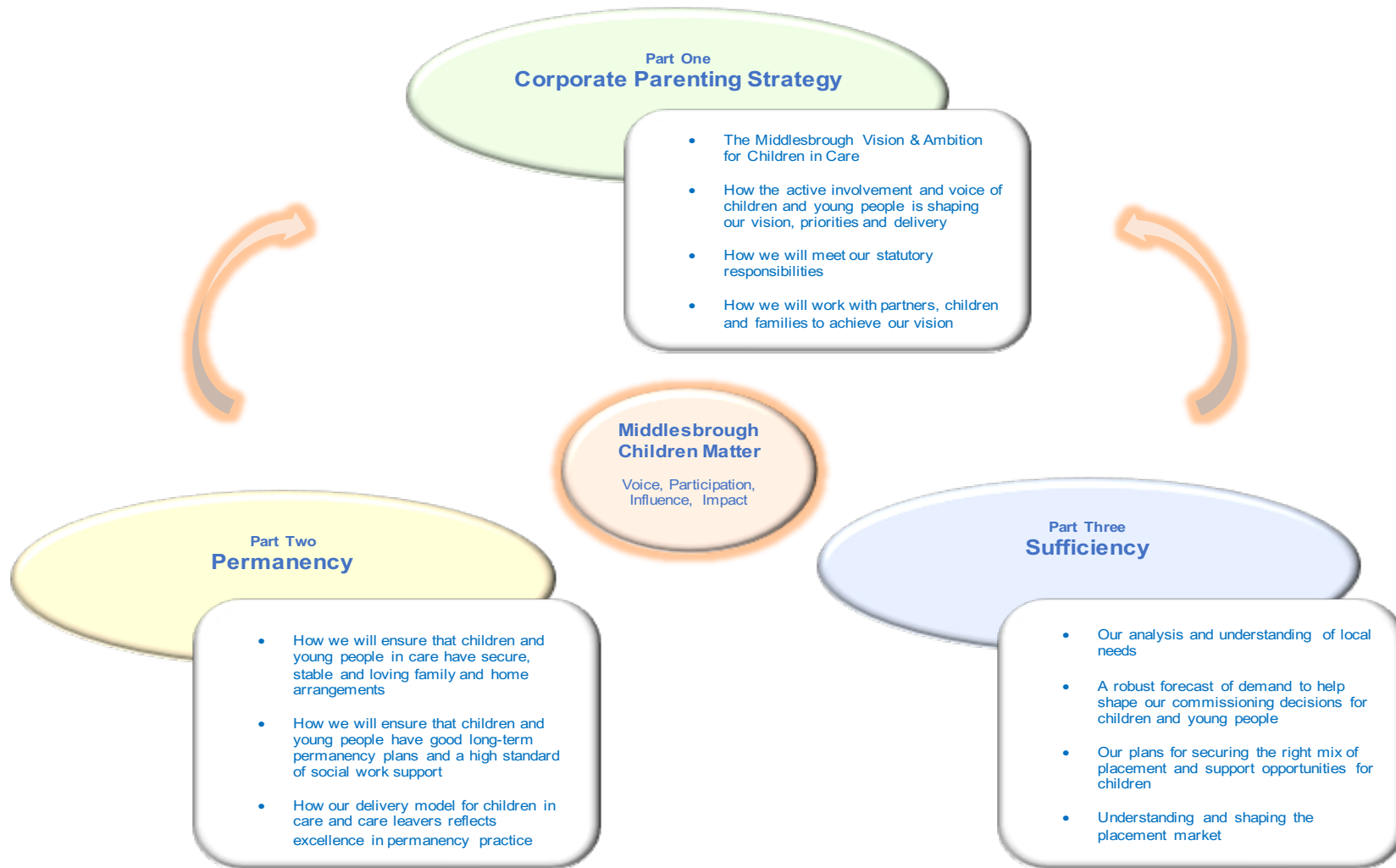
Our strategy is directly informed and shaped by the active involvement of local children and young people who have contributed their views and ideas based on their personal experiences, their aspirations and ambitions. This includes outputs from the work undertaken by our partnership with the innovative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

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

Signatories

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

OUR CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY – HOW IT WORKS



OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CORPORATE PARENTING – DEVELOPED WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

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



PARTICIPATION – THE VOICE OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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

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

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

How Children and Young People Influence Local Services in Middlesbrough



UNDERSTANDING CORPORATE PARENTING

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

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

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

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

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

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



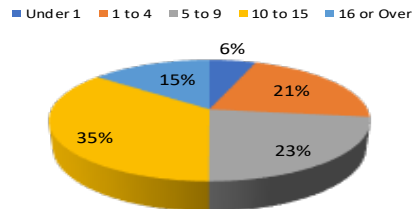
SOME KEY FACTS ABOUT OUR CHILDREN IN CARE

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

Numbers

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

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



Age & Gender

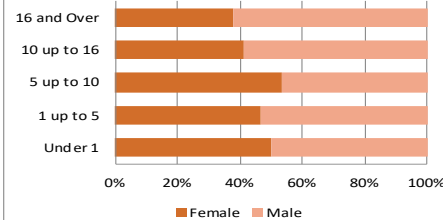
Of the current children and young people in our care:

20 young people (3%) started their care episode when they were over 16 years old

55 (8%) of children currently in our care over the age of 10 were brought into care when they were 5 years old or younger

15% of children in our care were newborns aged 0-1 – higher than the national average

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



Gender & Siblings

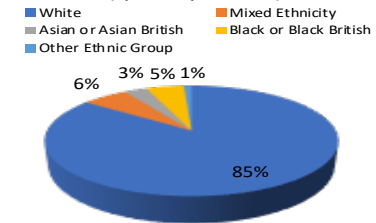
Middlesbrough has a similar female/male ratio as our statistical neighbours and the north east region

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

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

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

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



Ethnicity

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

6% are mixed ethnicity

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

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

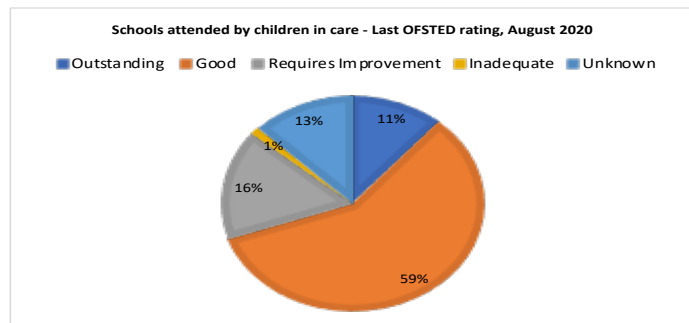
0.9% are Other Ethnicity. This is an under representation compared with school population (4%)

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

CHILDREN IN CARE & EDUCATION

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

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



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

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

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

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

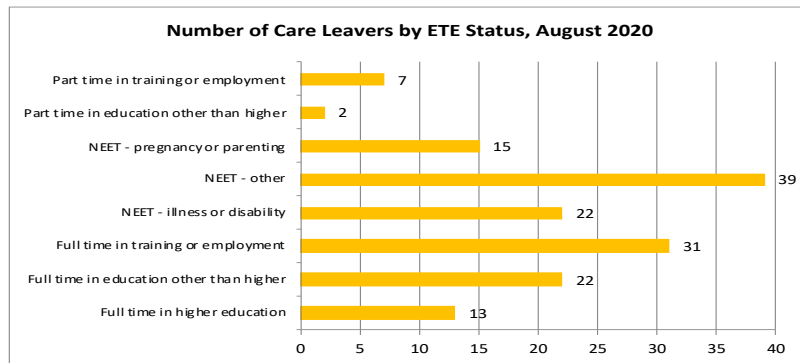
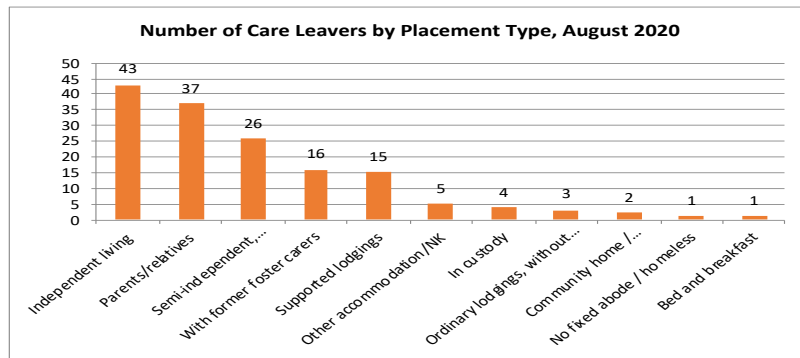
27% of our children in care receive support with special educational needs (without an Education and Healthcare Plan - EHCP)

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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

SOME KEY FACTS ABOUT OUR CARE LEAVERS

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



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

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

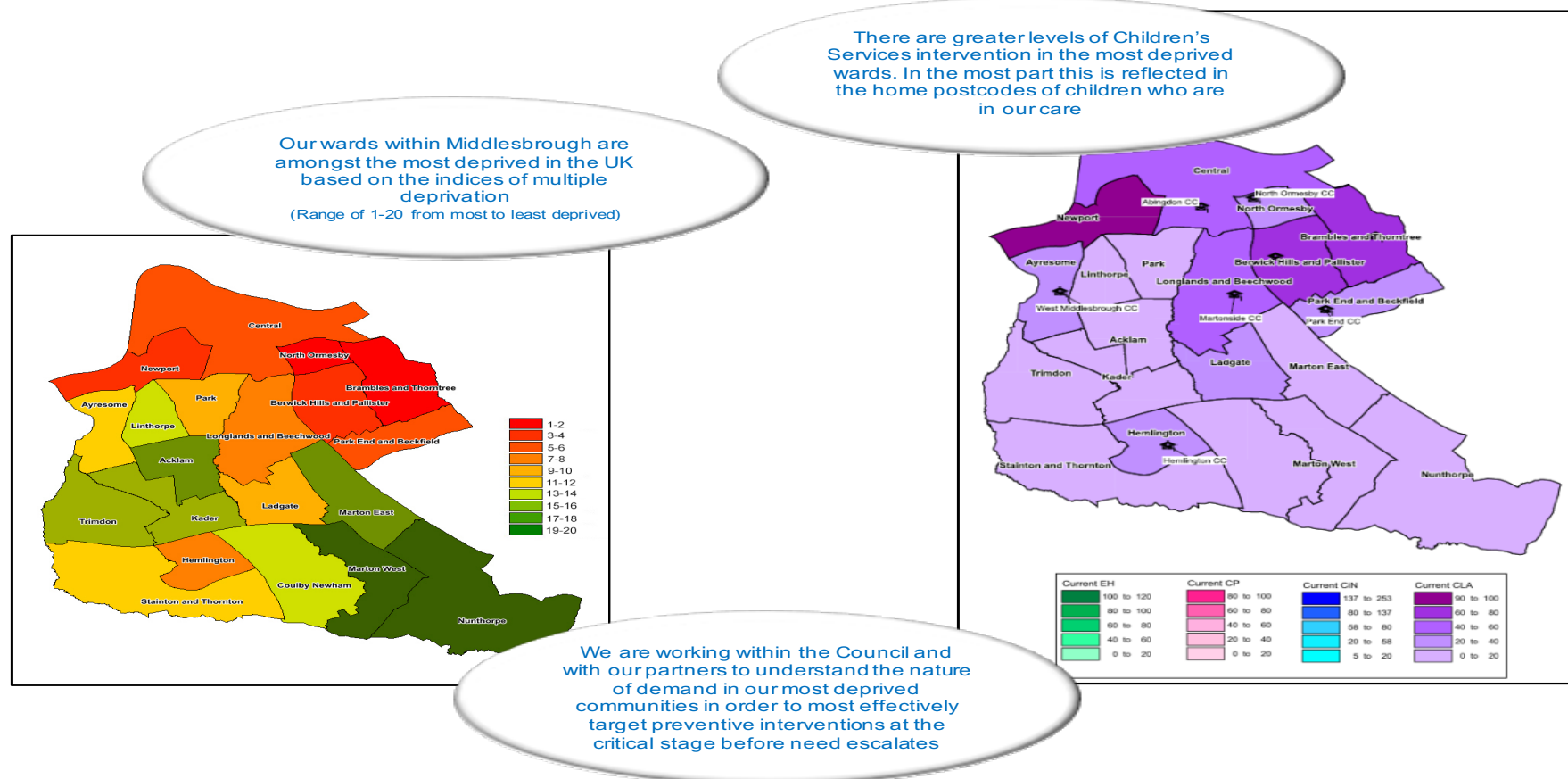
Whilst the proportion of our Care Leavers in education, employment or training has been rising since 2017, half of our Care Leavers are NEET (not in education, employment or training). Increasing this proportion is a critical priority for our work with Care Leavers

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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

OUR LOCAL PICTURE (Data at June 2020)

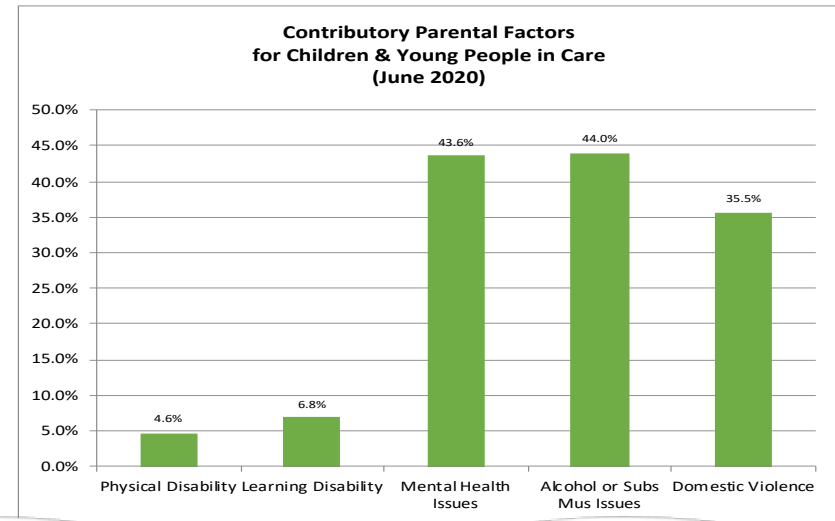
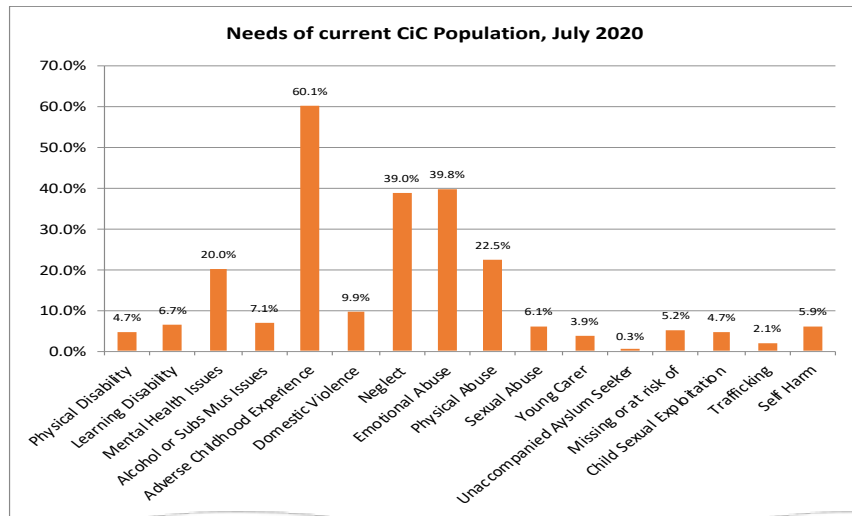
As we develop and deliver our Corporate Parenting Strategy we are using our local data to grow our understanding of the specific issues faced by children, young people and their families within our local communities. This increasingly focused analysis at neighborhood level will inform our support for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



Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

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

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



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

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

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

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

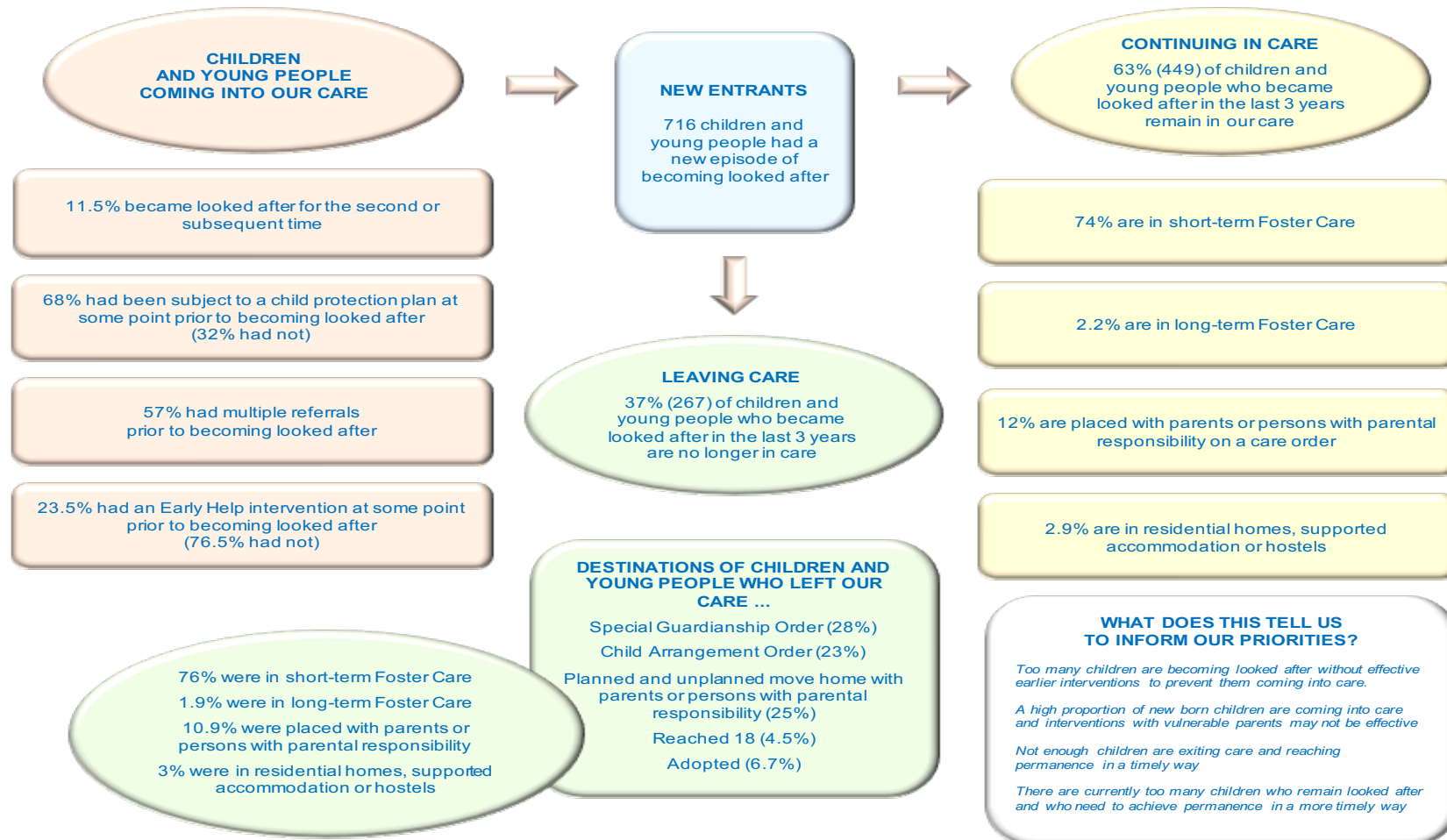
62% had a single or multiple referral to Children's Services before coming into our care and 69% were known to our Child Protection services

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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S JOURNEY

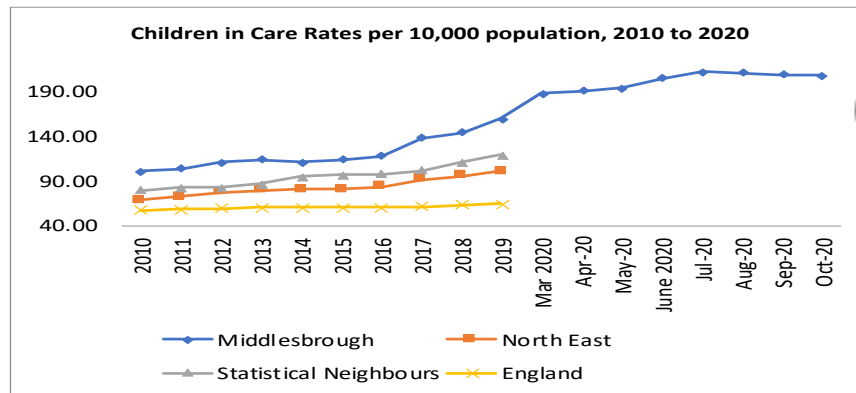
The diagram below provides further insight into the journey of children and young people who come into our care in Middlesbrough, and their individual permanence options and living arrangements. This illustration is based on data covering the 3-year period April 2017 to June 2020.



Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

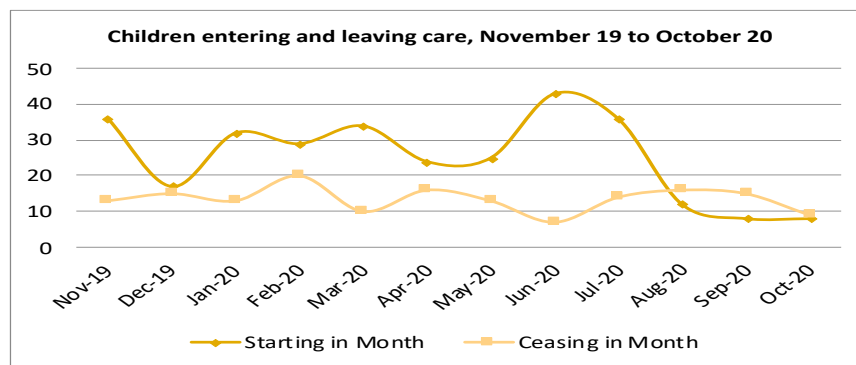
UNDERSTANDING DEMAND

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



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

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



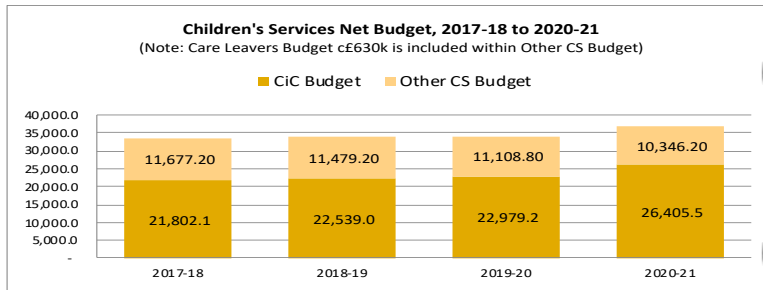
The resource impact of the steady increase in the numbers of children and young people entering care has been intensified by the correspondingly slow rate of children ceasing to be looked after

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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

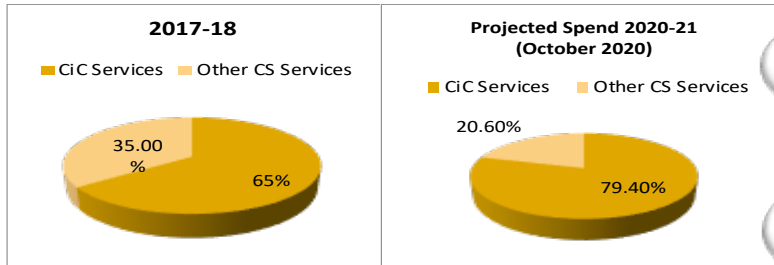
RESOURCING OUR SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

OUR GOVERNANCE FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

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

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

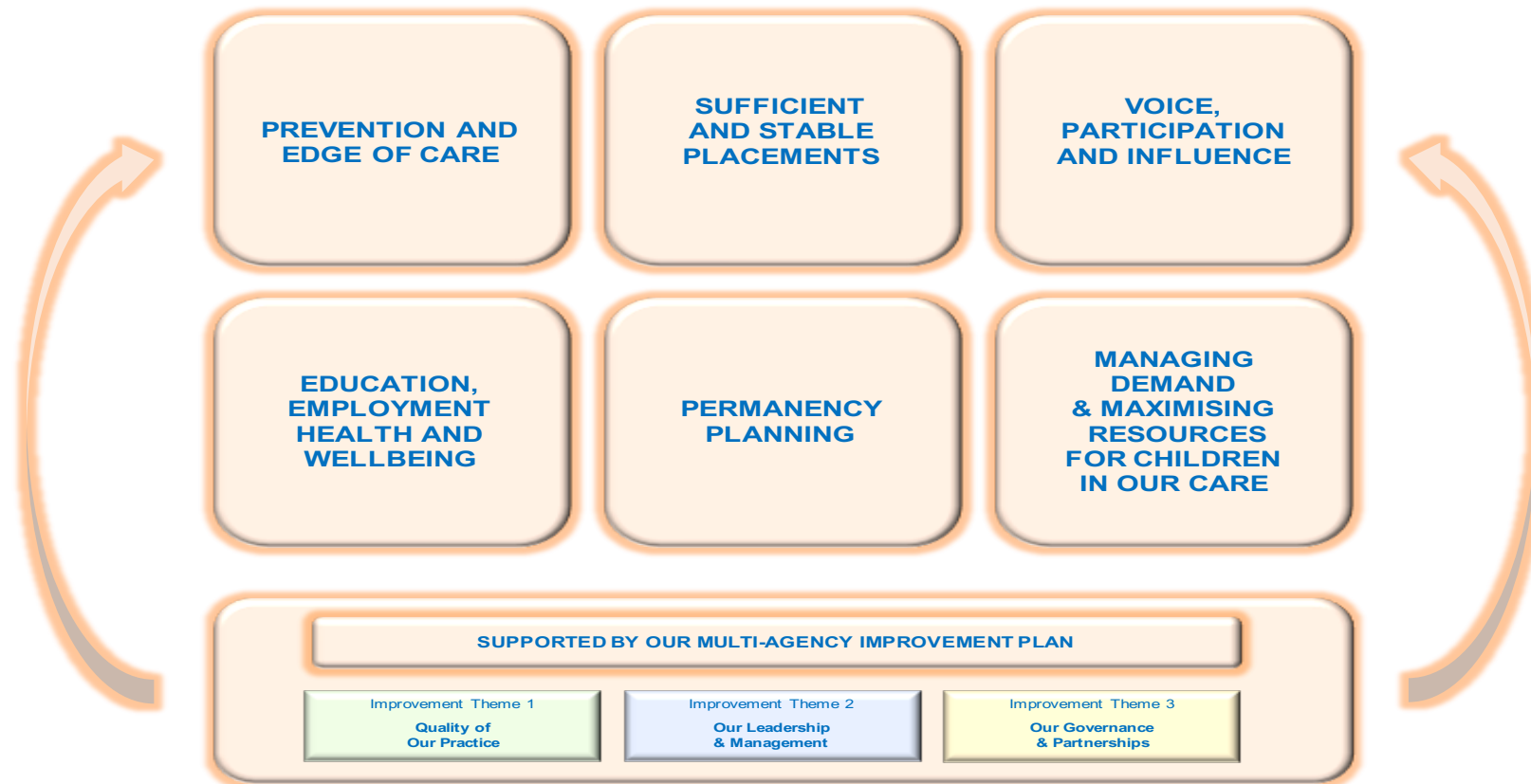


The transformation of our corporate parenting offer is supported by a strong emphasis on improving the way that we capture and make use of information to plan, deliver and evaluate impact. Our dedicated Programme Board is driving forward work to improve the quality and timeliness of our information,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

OUR CORPORATE PARENTING PRIORITIES FOR 2020-23

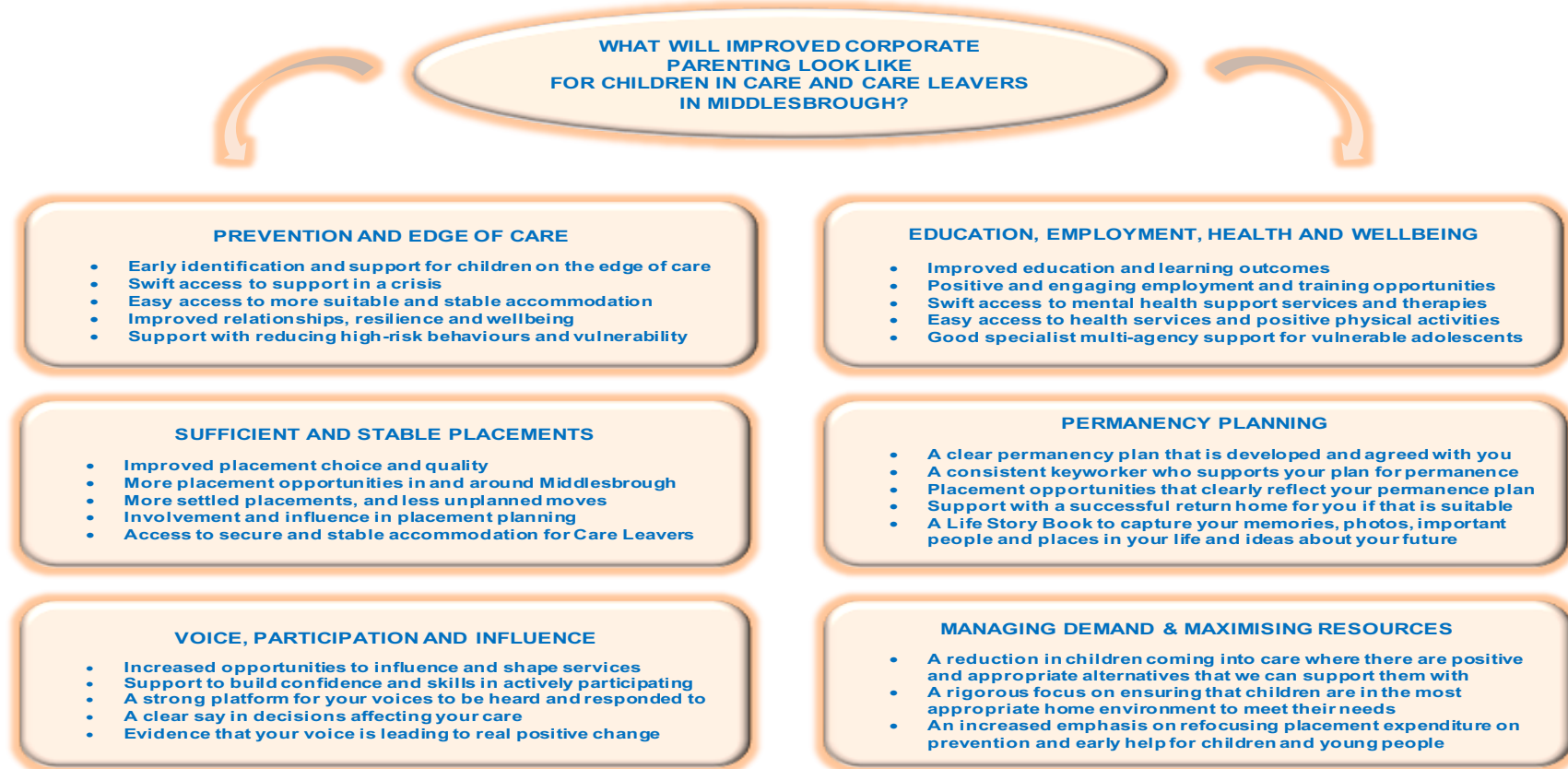
Our Multi-Agency Improvement Plan for children and young people in Middlesbrough clearly identifies what we need to do to strengthen the quality and impact of our support for children in care and care leavers, based on learning from our Ofsted inspection (published in January 2020), as well as feedback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

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



HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?

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



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

PART TWO

OUR PERMANENCY PLAN FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIDDLESBROUGH

2020-23



MIDDLESBROUGH
CHILDREN
M A T T E R

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WELCOME TO OUR PERMANENCY STRATEGY

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

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

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

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

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

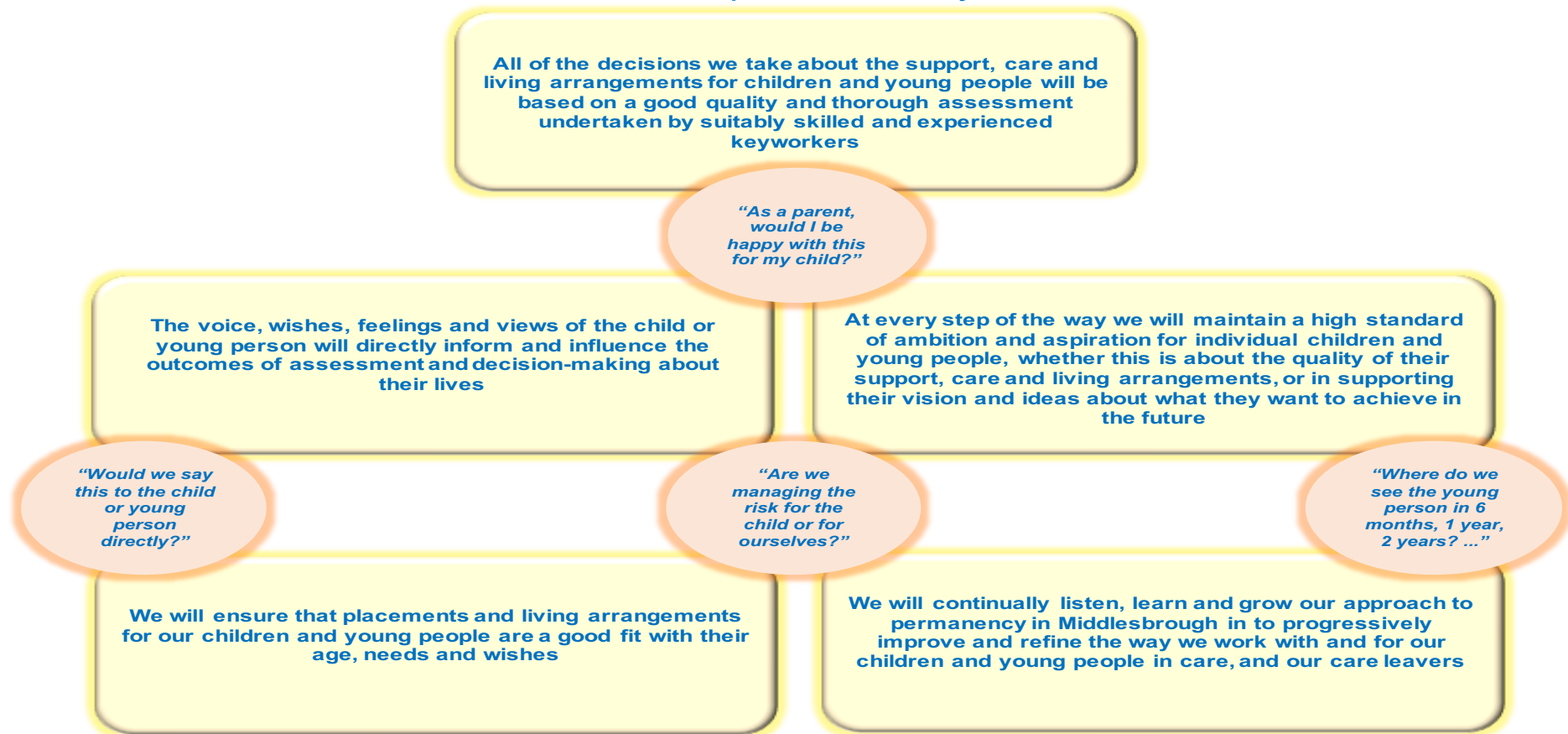
Embedding a culture of good permanence practice in Middlesbrough is core business for the local authority and is at the heart of our improvement journey. We do not underestimate the raw energy and rigour that it will take to deliver our ambitions for children and young people. Our determination to improve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

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

OUR APPROACH TO PERMANENCY IN MIDDLESBROUGH

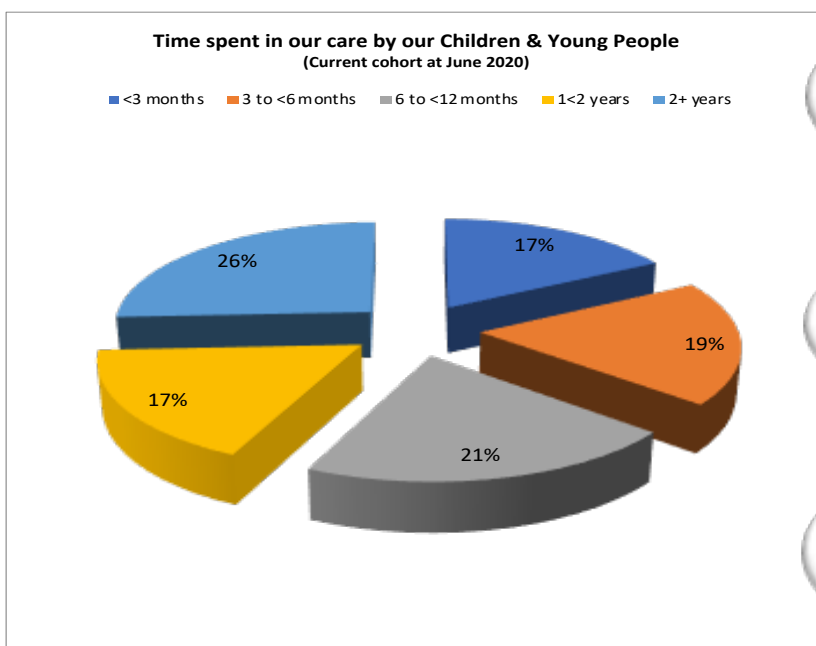
The core purpose of our permanency practice is to ensure that all children and young people in our care are growing up in stable, secure, safe and nurturing living arrangements, and are supported in a positive transition to independence and adult life. This is reflected in our social work practice, and in our systems, processes and partnerships for permanency. The provocations from Futures for Families provide a critical reference point for us as we strive to improve the quality and impact of our permanence arrangements for children and young people in Middlesbrough.

Our Principles for Permanency



TIME SPENT IN OUR CARE – SOME KEY FACTS

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



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

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

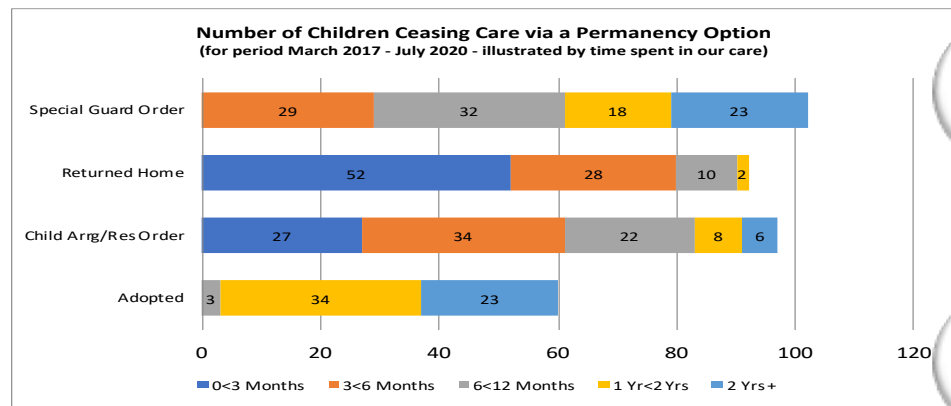
When we consider this increase in time spent in care, coupled with decreasing numbers leaving our care, this clearly highlights an urgent need to transform our permanency practice, and to tackle drift and delay for individual children and young people

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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

TIMESCALES FOR PERMANENCY – SOME KEY FACTS

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



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

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

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

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

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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

OUR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE MODEL

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



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

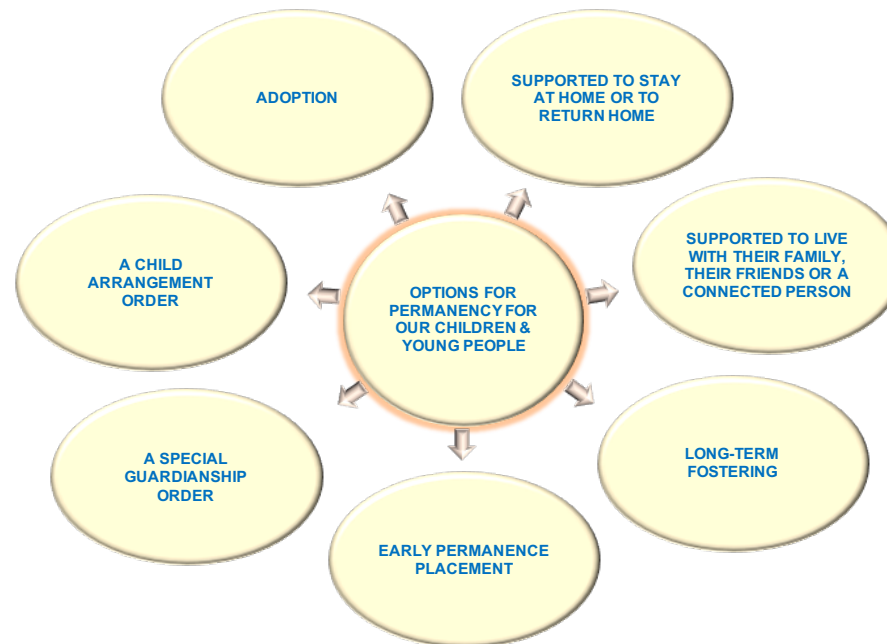
OUR PATHWAY TO PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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



OPTIONS FOR PERMANENCY

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



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

OUR PRIORITIES FOR PERMANENCY

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



HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?

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



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

PART THREE

OUR SUFFICIENCY PLAN FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIDDLESBROUGH

2020-23



MIDDLESBROUGH
CHILDREN
MATTER

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PART THREE: SUFFICIENCY

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WELCOME TO OUR SUFFICIENCY PLAN

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

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

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

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

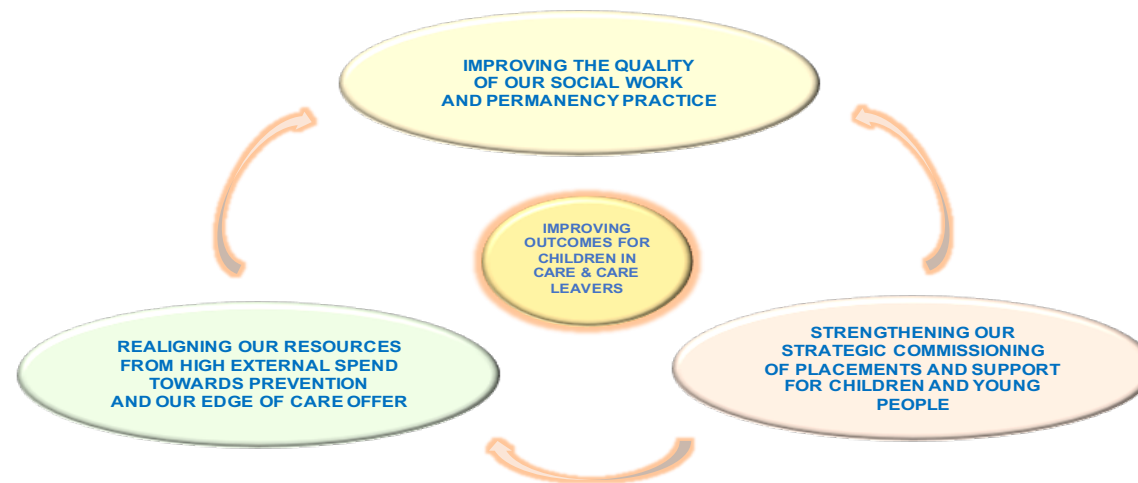
We will work in partnership to shape our commissioning and delivery arrangements in a way that makes a positive difference to the quality and impact of our offer, and to the way we are maximising the impact of our combined multi-agency resources. Strengthening our relationships and dialogue with the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

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

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

OUR APPROACH TO SUFFICIENCY IN MIDDLESBROUGH

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

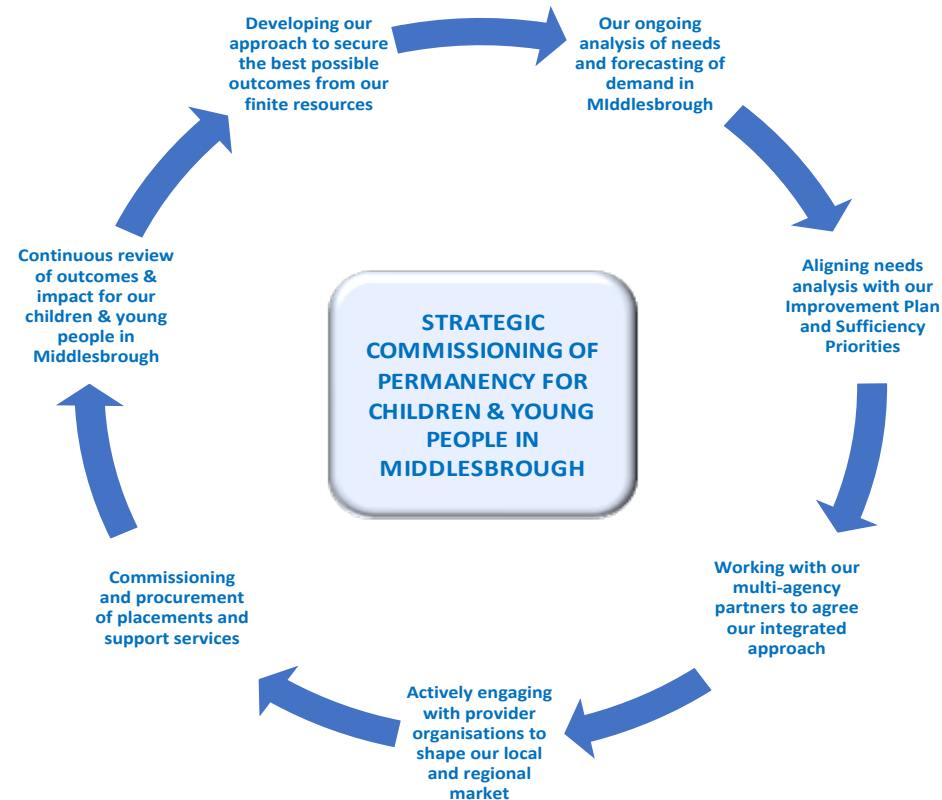


Delivery of these three integrated elements of change is business-critical to achieving the wider improvement priorities set out in our Strategic Improvement Plan. Success will require a significant shift in our corporate working and partnership arrangements:

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

OUR COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUFFICIENCY

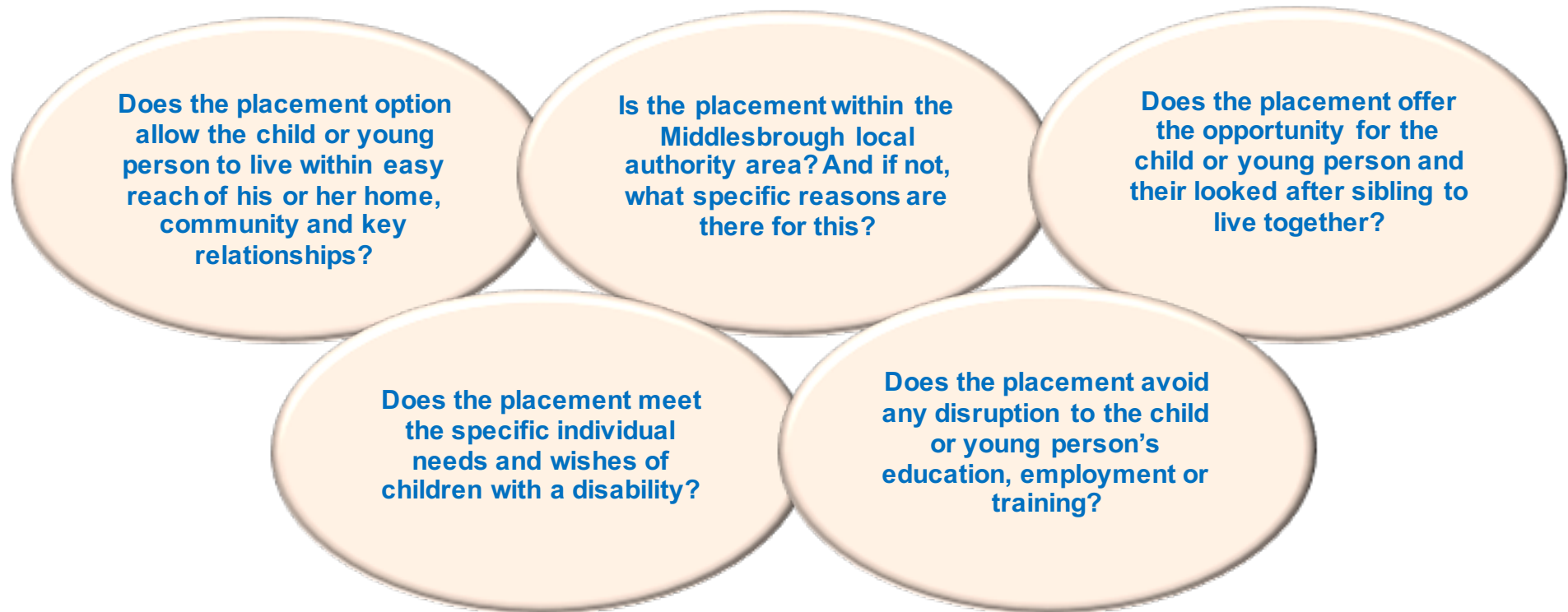
We recognise that securing delivery of our ambitions for sustainable positive improvement in our permanency and sufficiency for children and young people in Middlesbrough will require a step-change in our commissioning arrangements. We are building on the strong skills and knowledge of our established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



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

OUR COMMISSIONING PROVOCATIONS FOR CHILDREN IN CARE & CARE LEAVERS

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

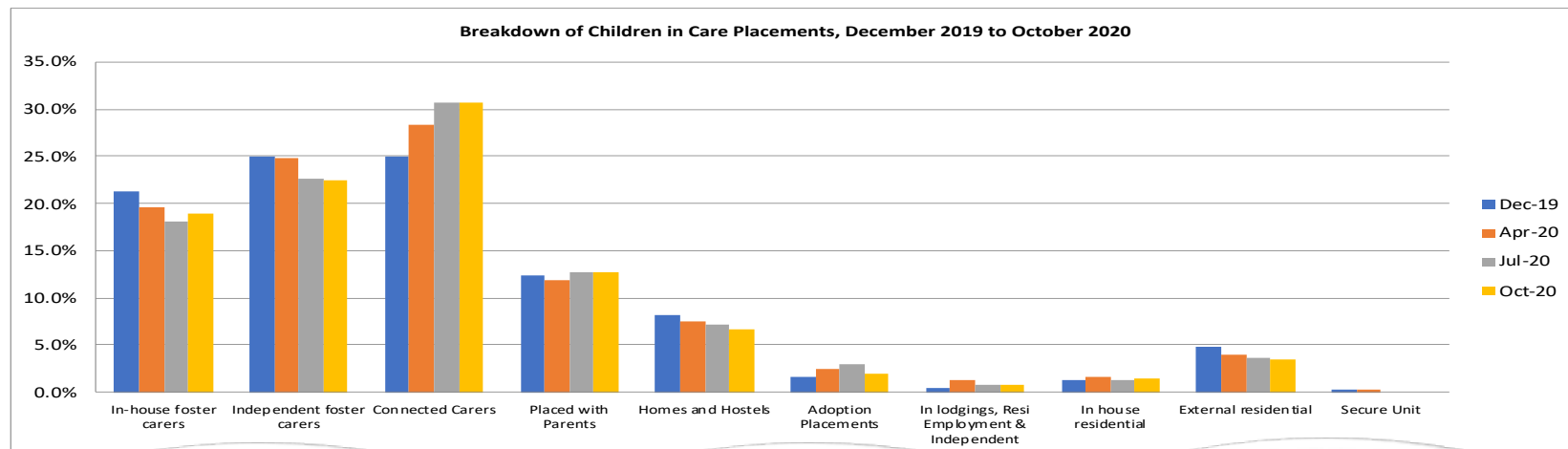


These provocations provide a practical reference point for our commissioners and our frontline social work staff when we are considering permanency options for children in care and care leavers. This is directly reflected in our policy and practice guidance which will inform how we shape our local market,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

PLACEMENTS FOR OUR CHILDREN IN CARE – SOME KEY FACTS

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

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



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

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

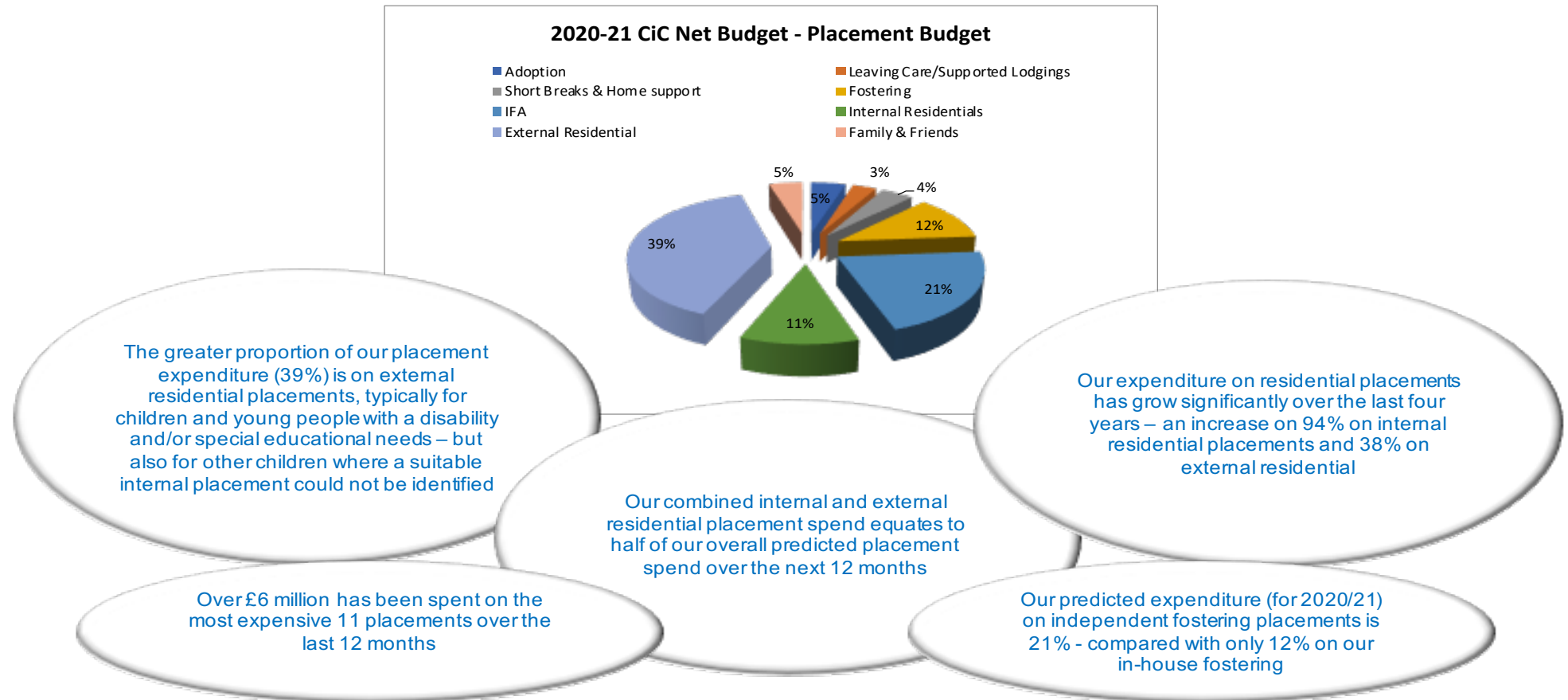
The proportion of children and young people who are placed with connected carers has risen from 25% to 31% over the last 12 months – understanding this increase is a key line of enquiry for our permanency and sufficiency planning

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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

RESOURCING PLACEMENTS FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

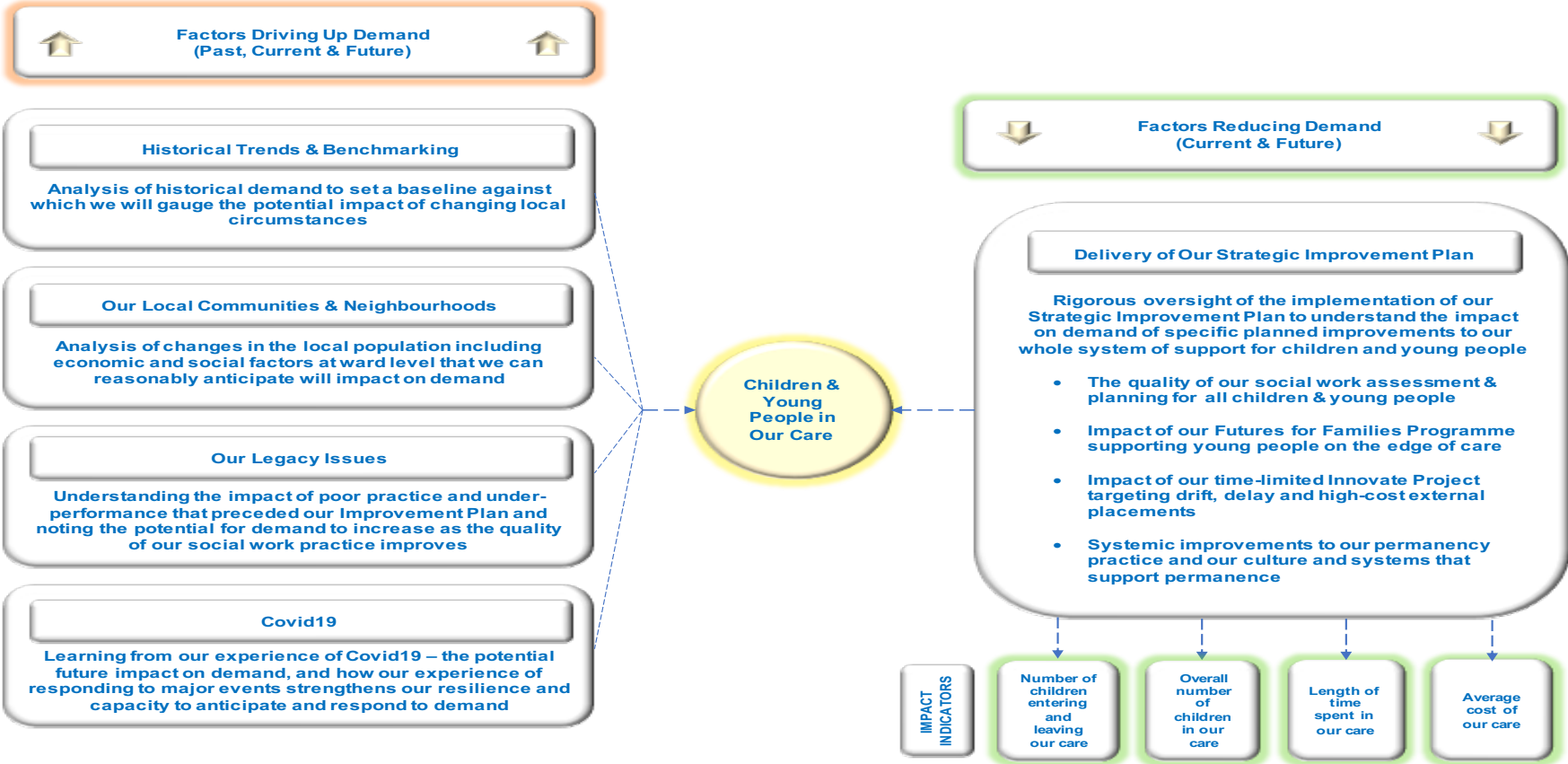
The positive resourcing implications of more effective sufficiency and permanence planning, and how this might benefit our wider improvement priorities in Middlesbrough are clearly illustrated when we consider that *93% of our net budget for children in care and care leavers is projected to be spent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



Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

OUR FORECASTING MODEL

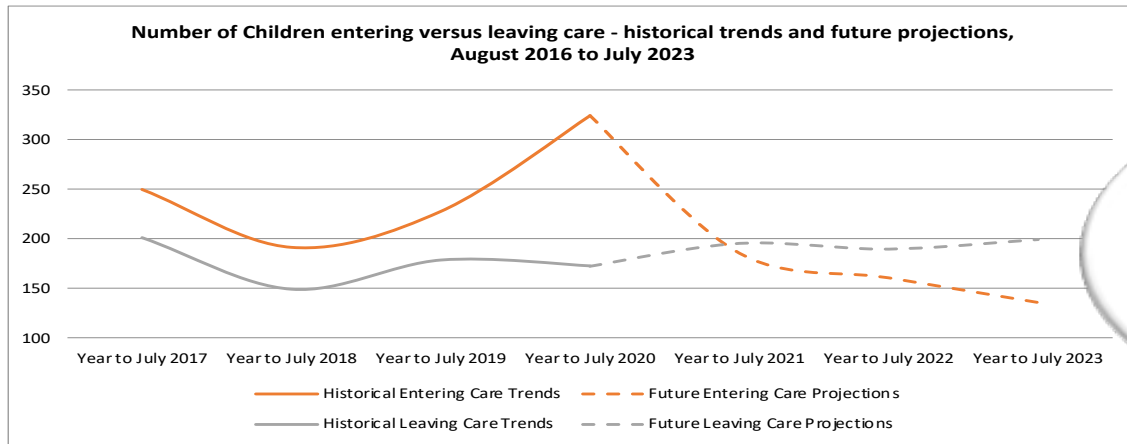
Developing a robust forecasting methodology to inform and drive our sufficiency and commissioning activity for children and young people is a key improvement priority for Middlesbrough. The Council are moving towards implementation for Children’s Services of a new operating model for forecasting which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



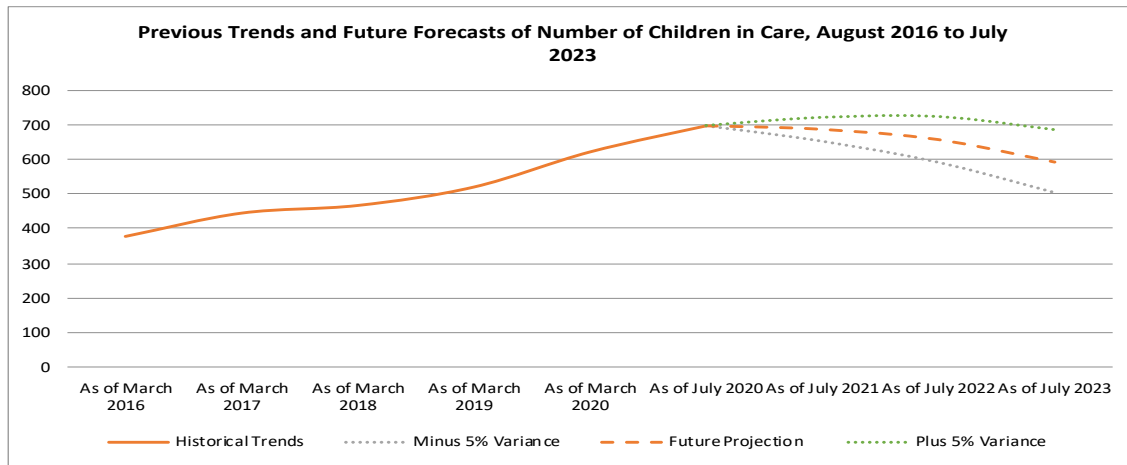
Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

FORECASTING DEMAND – OUR INITIAL ANALYSIS

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



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

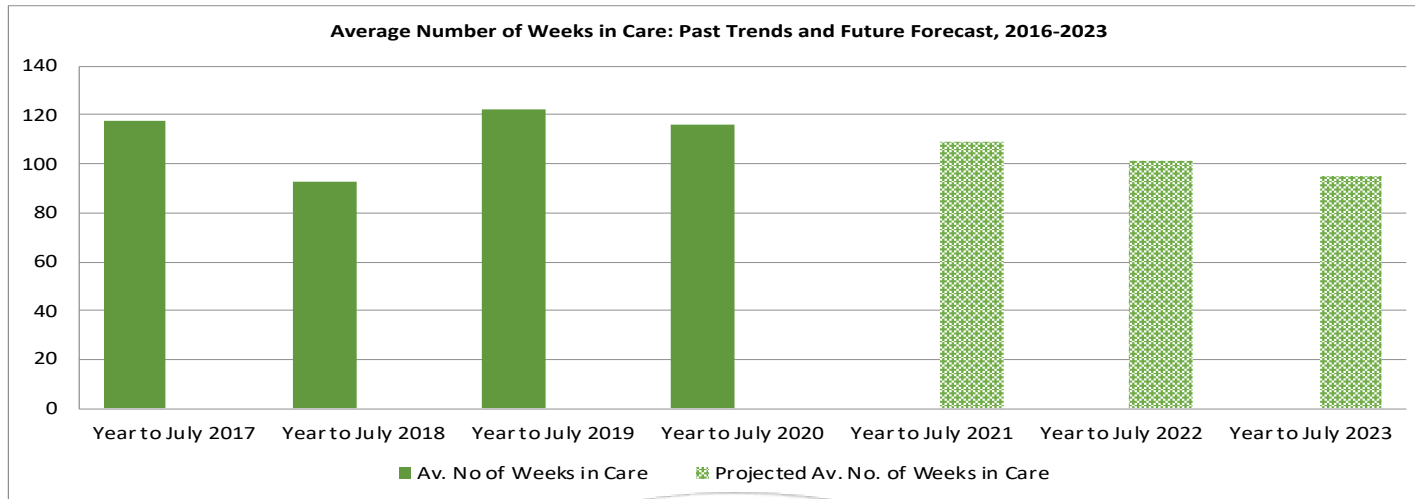


Overall placement cost will be a key proxy indicator for identifying how we can most effectively target our finite resources to secure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in our care. This will inform more detailed analysis of our overall placement spend to inform our commissioning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

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

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

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



Previous trends for the past four years for children ceasing care have shown that they have spent an average of 113 weeks in our care. Initial analysis suggests that this period will slowly but steadily reduce as we incrementally improve our social work practice

The length of time that children and young people spend in our care as they move towards a suitable permanent home is a key proxy indicator of the impact of planned improvements to our permanency practice. The data that informs this indicator will be analysed in detail to identify specific points in children and young people's journey through our care where we need to swiftly target drift, delay or poor practice secure a timely permanence option for the those children and young people who are in our care

Our forecasting will be under regular review to incorporate changing trends as our anticipated improvements to social work and permanency practice have a direct impact on the time that children and young people spend in our care before moving on to positive permanency outcomes

Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

ANTICIPATING OUR FUTURE PLACEMENT NEEDS AND DEVELOPING OUR MARKET

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

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

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

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

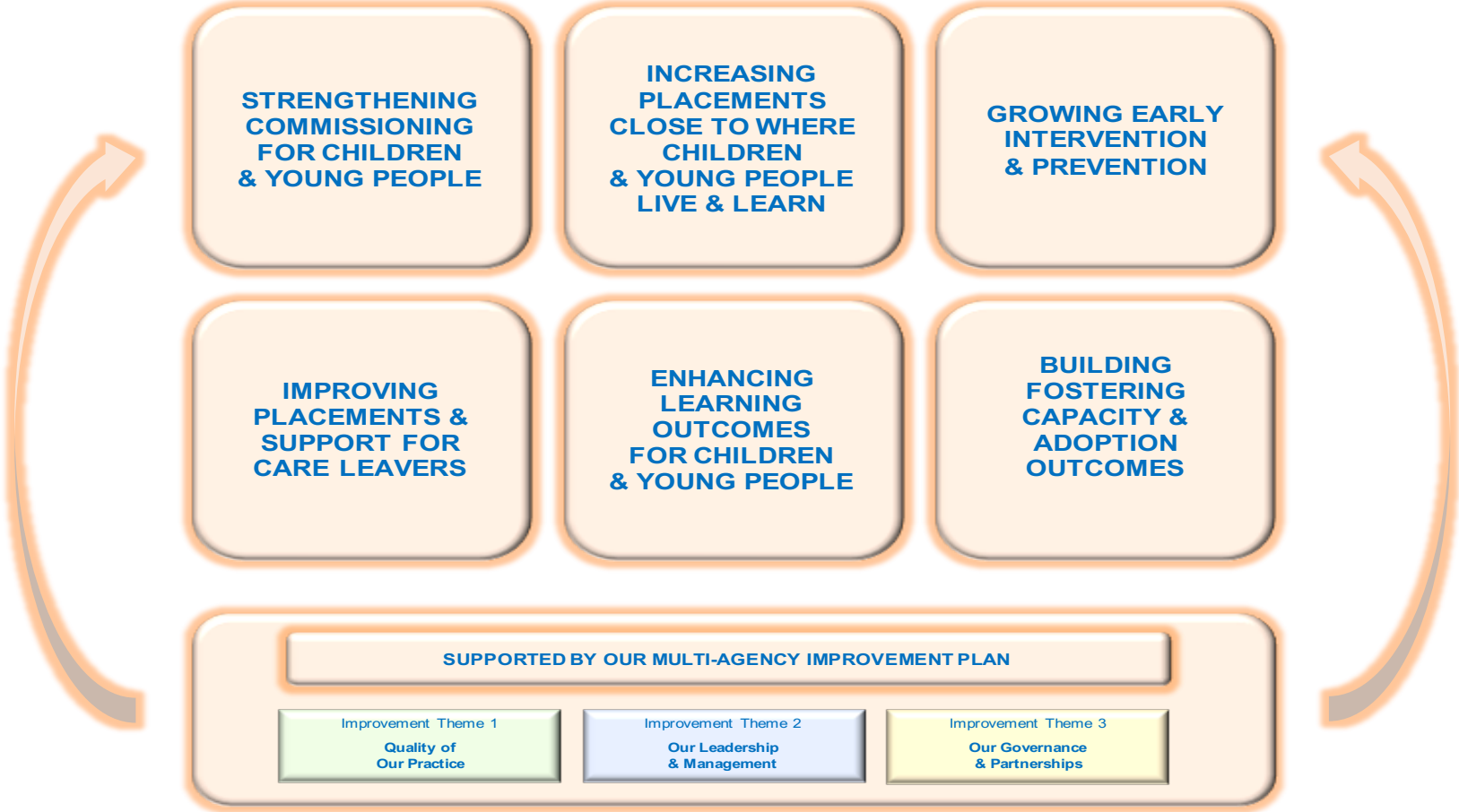
Initial development of our forecasting model has identified six themes (set out overleaf) which will provide the framework for our detailed action planning and implementation. Each priority is supported by clear impact measures. In addition to priorities that relate to our Corporate Parenting Strategy,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

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

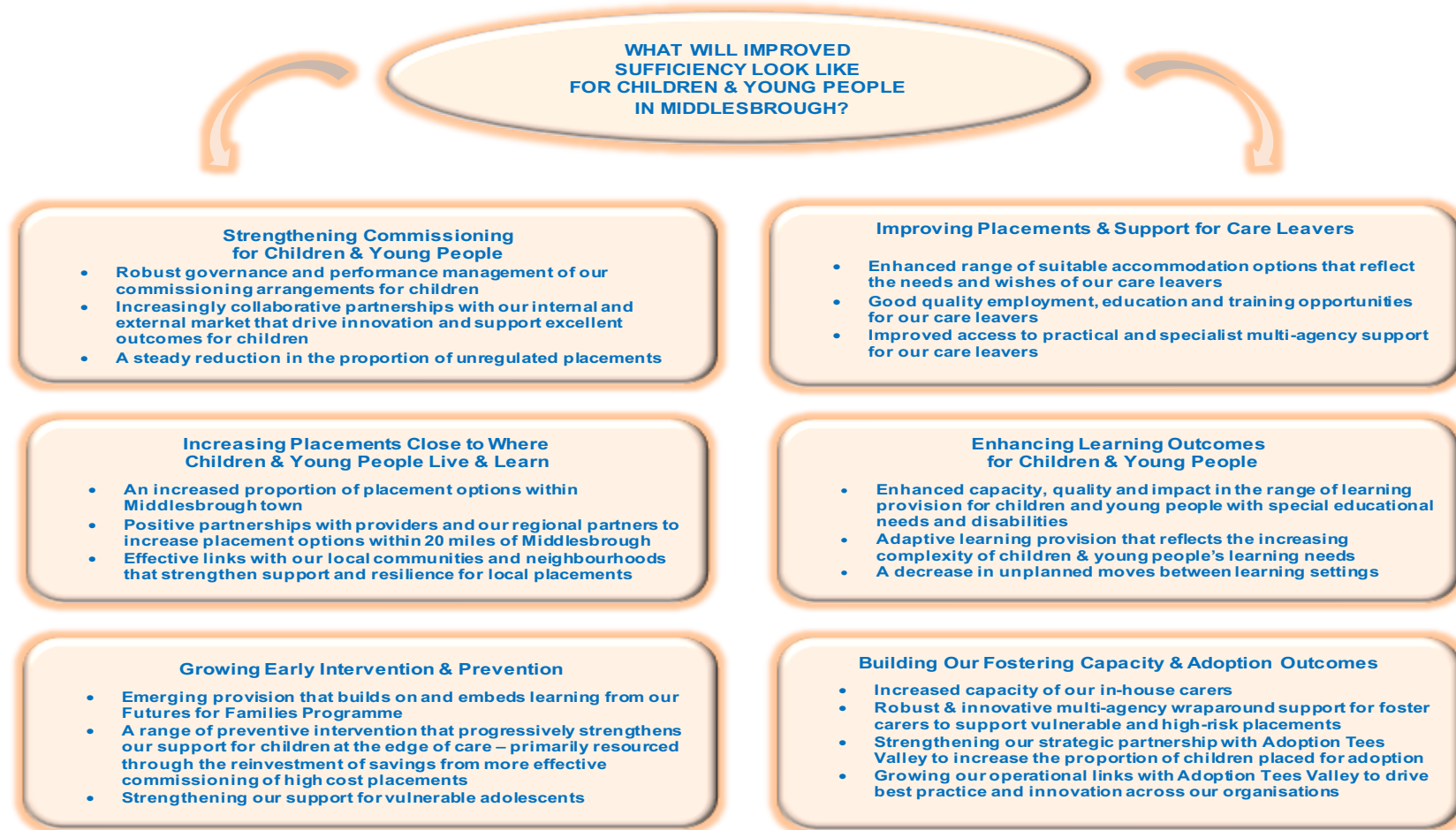
Reference Evidence Summary document for further supporting analysis & data

OUR SUFFICIENCY PRIORITIES

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



HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE?



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

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

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

Targets shown are for 2020-21.

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