

13/07/2021

Permanence Action Plan Highlight Report 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

- Practice Standards have been signed off and launched to the workforce
- Permanency Pathway is developed and ready for sign off and launch
- Legal Gateway Panel relaunched with a new terms of reference
- A Legal Gateway Tracker is in place to progress and track care proceedings
- The Practice Model has been designed and launched to the workforce
- Strengthening Practice have been commissioned to deliver a comprehensive Permanence training programme to the workforce
- Permanence Month arranged to deliver updated procedures and internal practice guidance to staff
- The Supervision Policy has been reviewed and updated
- Permanence Guidance has been written, signed off and circulated to the workforce identifying all permanence pathways
- Procedures for all permanence practice and pathways are being updated and relaunched and in various stages of completion
- A Workforce Recruitment Strategy has been developed and is awaiting Corporate approval to support the recruitment of a stable workforce

Theme 2 - Growing Our Multi-Agency Partnerships for Permanence

- Placement Stability Guidance written and shared with the workforce

- There is strengthened partnership working with Adoption Tees Valley, including the joint recruitment of an Adoption Panel Chair
- Strengthened joint working with Virtual Schools. Weekly reviews of children absent from school or without adequate education
- Governance agreed and forward work programme for the progress of the plan to be reported to Corporate Parenting Board
- Process of assessing for post adoption support has been developed by Adoption Tees Valley and signed off by the adoption leads across the Tees Valley

Theme 3 – Reducing Drift and Delay for Achieving Permanence

- Family Group Conferencing is now an established part of pre-proceedings, ensuring that family arrangements are considered at an earlier stage.
- Adoption procedures have been reviewed and amended to support timely assessment, matching and progression of the pan of adoption – awaiting sign off.
- Special Guardianship procedures have been reviewed and updated to support timely assessments, placement and post order support – awaiting sign off
- The terms of reference for Permanency Monitoring Group have been reviewed
- Permanency Monitoring Group is 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
- Commissioned social work team in place to support children to achieve permanence in a timely manner.

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

- Life Story Tool kit has been devised by Practice Leads and launched
- 40 staff are due to be trained in the delivery of life story work 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.

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

- Permanence Tracker has been developed and signed off and is used to drive effective permanence planning
- Legal Tracker developed and effectively used to track progression of all court cases
- Project manager in place to maintain the tracker

- Court Progression Officer appointed to ensure timely progression of court proceedings
- Legal Pathway has been launched on the LCS system to allow for more sophisticated performance reporting, tracking and management oversight
- LCS transformation programme has developed 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

Theme 6 – Supporting Permanence in Education, Employment and Training

- Middlesbrough School Moves Policy has been revised and launched.
- Virtual school have delivered training to staff regarding social work contribution to Personal Education Plans during Practice Week.
- Further Hot Topic sessions are scheduled for October.
- 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

There has been an 23.5% reduction in overall numbers of children looked after since August 2020

Since the height of 702 looked after children in September 2020, there has been a reduction of 165 looked after children.

163 children and young people have ceased to be looked after in the last 6 months.

The 20/21 adoption score card evidences that the in the 12 months leading up to 31 March 2021 the average number of days between Placement Orders and Adoption Order has reduced to 189 days. The 3 year average is 323 days.

There is a 56% increase of number of adoption orders in the year 20/21 (25) compared to 2019/2020 (16).

In this year to date 13 Adoption Orders have been secured.

There are currently a further 33 children progressing to adoption with Placement Orders

Since Jan 2021 there has been 54 Connected Carers placements commence and 114 cease

The number of children in Connected Carers placements has dropped from 210 in Sep 2020 to 112 July 2021. (47% reduction)

The number of children placed with parents has dropped from 99 in September 2020 to 58 in August 2021. (41% reduction)

Since Jan 2021 there has been 17 Placement with Parents commence and 51 cease

There is an increased number of children in Fostering to Adopt placements

Children progress though pre proceedings in a more timely way.

The Commissioner reported in July 2021 on progress made and identified that:

"Within the permanency strategy considerable progress has been made in the tracking and oversight of children within the care system. This has led to impressive performance in timely moves for more children into adoptive placements and a significant increase in the use of special guardianship etc. We also see evidence of more appropriate use of Public Law Outline, a reduction in emergency hearings and a stronger relationship of trust is described with CAFCASS (Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Services)"

5.0 Risks

- The increase in demand across the service and across the tees valley region
- Staffing instability across the looked after and care leaving service could impact on performance and leads to children experience multiple social workers.

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 be driven
- 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
- Develop further practice standards for Placement with Parent/Special Guardianship Orders and Reunification
- To continue to work with Partners in Practice to develop improved fostering processes

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

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