



Children in Our Care Strategic Group (CIOCSG) Update

Report for Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) 6 August 2021

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Section 1: Items Discussed

Refreshed CIOCSG Approach

Our children in our care (CIOC) and Care Leavers Strategy is due to be renewed in 2021 and it is therefore timely to also consider a refreshed approach around the CIOCSG. The last 16 months has brought unforeseen circumstances with the pandemic having an impact on CIOC, staff across all partners and the way in which we have been able to deliver our services. The impact on the CIOCSG is that this has become more of an information sharing forum (understandably so) but given that Government and Public Health England advice is that COVID is 'not going away', it feels appropriate to re-focus on the role and remit of the CIOCSG.

We need a more focussed approach to ensure that the right work is being undertaken, we are working to a clear set of actions and we are clear about what it is we are doing and what it is we want to achieve. This will support improved engagement with partners and enable improved reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board.

A new group (CIOC Core Group) is being brought together, made up of senior leads from within Children's Services, to work alongside the CIOCSG and will be used to identify tasks and drive forward change. Small, focussed task and finish groups will work on priorities, led by a Service Lead, with membership being identified across all partners, specific and appropriate to the work identified. Membership will be made up of partners from our CIOCSG.

Our CIOCSG will become a stakeholder meeting to look at specific issues with partners. The current CIOCSG Terms of Reference (ToR) will be refreshed to ensure the correct membership, and that aims and governance arrangements are clear and understood. A workplan will drive forward the change that we aspire to, in order to improve outcomes for Children in Our Care and Care Leavers.

Priorities identified:

1. To keep families together.
2. To develop high quality specialist provision.
3. To Capture the voice of the child and use this voice to develop and improve services and practice.

Plan of work to drive forward change:

1. Strategy

CIOC and Care Leavers strategy to be refreshed.

2. Keeping families safe

- Sufficiency and commissioning strategy to be developed.
- Ensure that good quality provision meets demand and need.
- We need to ensure that affordable housing is available within the Local Authority if we want children to reside in Stockton with their birth families.
- We need sufficient foster carers and residential children's homes to support children remaining in the Borough.
- We need to review our current foster carers offer to ensure that we are competitive.
- We need to ensure continued development of our 'Edge of Care' service.

3. Finance

We need to consider different model options to support our Medium-Term Financial Plan.

4. Schools

- We need to close the gap between CIOC and those children not looked after.
- We need to further roll out trauma informed practice.
- We need to ensure that the educational needs of CIOC are considered in all planning.

5. Health (including CAMHS)

- We need to review our current strategies to ensure services meet need.
- We need to further improve partner engagement.
- Understand what our data is telling us – where are we performing well and where do we need to improve.

6. Voice of the child

- We need to ensure that the voice of the child is heard in all of our planning.
- We need to review current tools and approaches to capture the child's voice.
- Ensure continued support for the 'Let's Take Action' group.
- Ensure continued support for 'Bright Minds, Bright Futures'.
- Ensure continued support for our Children in Care Council.

7. Care Leavers

- We need to review our current Care Leavers offer.
- We need to be more open to learn from others – is there more we can do, listen to what it is our Care Leavers need/want.
- Develop a marketing strategy.

8. Training and employment

- Ensure that Employment, Education and Training (EET) is a primary focus of Children's Services and Partner's.
- Ensure that relevant job descriptions include capacity in order to deliver on agreed scrutiny outcomes.
- Increase opportunities for young people both within the Council and with other employees.

9. Performance

- Regular data to be shared with CIOCSG members so that all (including partners) understand 'our story', we all understand where we are performing well and those areas for priority improvement.
- Use the data to tell us if/where we are having an impact.

10. Governance

- Refresh the CIOCSG Terms of Reference (ToR).
- Develop a clear CIOC work plan.

11. Innovation

- Continue with shaping a brighter future 'More than just a job' workstream to deliver on the existing action plan.
- Raise the awareness of the Corporate Parenting Board within the Council and with Partners.
- Develop even stronger links with 'Bright Minds Bright Futures'.

To note : The work plan is still in the process of being developed.

Virtual School Update

As you will be aware due to the COVID lockdown national assessments and examinations did not take place in primary and secondary schools, instead in Years 11 and 13 students were awarded grades based on teacher assessments and schools and colleges are under no obligation to share or publish their results. As a consequence, no validated examination or assessment data is available for Children in our Care.

In addition, all other educational measures (CIOC with one Fixed Term Exclusion, unauthorized absence, overall absence, percentage of CIOC who are persistent absentees, percentage of CIOC (with an EHCP) have also not yet been updated.

What we can report on though is what the Virtual School have provided in terms of support and provision during the pandemic:

Response to COVID 19 - work undertaken by the Virtual School:

- Engagement in all Virtual meetings for CIOC
- Challenge and support continuing through the virtual environment
- Day to day work continuing with team working from home
- Monthly newsletters for carer's and Designated Teacher's, encompassing current thinking and advice on learning in lockdown and mental health support during lockdown
- Changes to the Personal Education Plan (PEP), including a COVID19 page, to capture changes, challenges, and successes during this period
- Working with schools and social workers to support attendance where appropriate for CIOC
- Designated Teacher meetings held via Zoom
- Continuation of Attachment Training where appropriate for Schools
- Carer review of 'Learning in Lockdown'
- Virtual Thrive assessments
- Continuation of work with individual CIOC via telephone and video conferencing
- Signed up for Maths research project for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 CIOC
- Attendance at Webinars to ensure the team are up to date with current guidance, sharing good practice and continuing our CPD

Additional work throughout the second lockdown has included:

- Working as part of the Wellbeing for Education Return delivery team
- Monitoring meetings for Year 6 and 10 following the first lockdown (March to July) to support schools with reintegration and catch up
- Review of data analysis working with the Planning and Performance Team
- KS2 hub held Virtually with the theme of Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies

- Carrying out psychological assessments and formulations, offering advice and support about the needs of CIOC and how best to support them in school and within residential care (in and out of area)
- Providing psychology informed facilitation within virtual school and with residential home managers
- Providing psychological knowledge of child development within the Early Years Strategy Group
- Developing bespoke training for schools based on need and local context
- Resuming face to face with individual CIOC with SEMH support and reading intervention

Further proposed work:

- Continuation of Transition research
- Video Interaction Guidance therapeutic intervention starting after Easter with a child, carer, and school.

COVID recovery plan for CIOC comprising of:

- Enhanced Social Emotional and Mental Health offer (SEMH) to include, (promotion of the LA offer, Thrive assessments, monthly EP problem solving groups, enhanced CPD offer, promotion of CAMHS training offer, Emotional Regulation Toolkit)
- Learning support to include further roll out of the reading booster sessions, provision of laptops to those still struggling to access online learning from pupil premium plus funding, access to NIMBL online learning package
- Additional activities: continued support of MSLTP, Care to Dance, Letterbox parcels, MFC, ICT Equipment
- Visits to schools to offer support and challenge where appropriate.
- Individual CIOC priorities – recorded in the action plan of the Summer and Autumn Term PEPs initially (with additional funds accounted for (£200 per CIOC))

Attendance of CIOC during lockdown

This is not a direct comparison due to the changes in how schools were required to record attendance for the first and second lockdowns. Further work will be completed to support a direct comparison:

Attendance summary for Lockdown 1 – 89.4%

Attendance summary for Lockdown 2 – 65%

Good News Stories

1. North East Great British Care Award

For the second year running one of our providers – ‘Sanctuary’, who offer accommodation and support to some of our Care Leavers and vulnerable young people, have been recognised with a regional industry award. This was a regional award within the ‘Housing with Care’ category and the service will now go through to this year’s national finals.

Sanctuary were described as 'A fantastic service dealing with extremely vulnerable and high-risk young people. There is strong evidence of a very caring environment that never gives up on people and looks for opportunities for achieving successes'.

2. Apprenticeships

4 of our Care Leavers have been put forward for apprenticeships with a further assessment day planned to identify a further Care Leaver to go through the same scheme.

As well as opening up future employment opportunities these apprenticeships deliver crucial life skills and learning.

Rhona Bollands

Assistant Director Children's Social Care

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