



Children in Our Care Strategic Group (CIOCSG)

Update Report for Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) 11 February 2022

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Section 1: Items Discussed

CIOC Data

CIOC data was shared with CIOCSG members with further data identified where it was felt that it would be useful to monitor/scrutinise performance:

- Numbers of CIOC
- Numbers of children who became looked after compared to those who ceased to be looked after in the same period.
- Health and dental checks – timeliness and themes, patterns emerging to ensure services respond to need.
- Numbers of CIOC who had a missing incident in the last 1w months
- Stability of placements.
- Teenage pregnancy's (to include CIOC and Care Leavers).
- Care leavers – in touch with
- Care leavers in EET
- Care leavers in suitable accommodation

CIOC and Care Leavers action plan – progress

Priority 2. Improve Outcomes and Life chances

2.2 Close the gap between children in our care and those that are not:

The Virtual school continues to support staff and foster carers to understand and ultimately provide better support to those children who have suffered trauma as a result of adverse childhood experiences. Audits were commenced in December 2021 to identify those schools and educational settings who had/had not received Trauma informed practice so far. Specific targeted work with those schools who had had little by the way of training is due to be rolled out shortly. This will involve a bespoke training package based on the pyramid approach. Work is currently underway to develop a document to explain and give examples of the trauma informed approach as a useful tool for use alongside the training. Working either in partnership with Nurture UK or as a development ourselves, it is planned that Trauma informed practice will receive 'whole school' accreditation and award for practice in education.

Invites were sent out to schools in November 2021 to attend the first Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and trauma informed network session. The first session was held January 2022. The session considered how we can develop an awareness raising campaign across Stockton with a range of organisations, services and the public on the lasting impact of childhood adversity and trauma. Working towards a 'Compassionate Stockton'.

Training for foster carers is to be rolled out in Spring 2022 via the Family Thrive 6-week training course. This is to support foster carers in managing children's often challenging and difficult behaviour as a result of the trauma they have suffered.

The Virtual School Educational Psychologist has now commenced work to develop a strategic proposal for a trauma informed psychology educational outreach Hub. It is planned that this work will be finalised by February 2022. As part of the evidence for the rational of a Hub, it is planned that some Virtual School staff will visit similar trauma informed/psychology educational projects in other areas that offer excellent practice and placements for CIOC. This will include gathering evidence of other research-based practice around different models of trauma informed outreach provisions.

2.3. Healthy Lives

Dental care for CIOC:

The North Tees Health Foundation Trust (NTHFT) have continued to drive forward their project to improve the dental health pathway for CIOC. This work is now aligned with the work commissioners are undertaking with NHS England. A new dental pathway was launched in January 2022. This pathway will see children and carers who identify that they are unable to access dental care through their usual practice or have not been able to secure a place at a practice to have the opportunity to access it through a nominated practice. We then plan to monitor to see if this helps improve compliance against the dental review and ensure that children and young people have their required check. In addition, it is planned that staff undertaking the review health assessments for CIOC will receive training from a dentist to enable them to complete a basic but standardised oral examination to identify any issues. This will also support the health of children and young people whilst also improving performance. It is planned to evaluate this new pathway to ensure that it is effective.

Health assessments for CIOC:

The CCG have recently completed their tendering process with regards to the contract for CIOC Health services across the Tees Valley. Whilst NTHFT will continue to undertake the initial health assessments all reviews will be undertaken through the new contract. Whilst it is important that performance is improved, it is also planned that progress will be monitored around themes and patterns which emerge from these health assessments to ensure appropriate services are available for children and young people in care.

Priority 3 – Seek to keep families together and close to their communities

3.3/4:

We are looking at expanding our provision to meet need. We want to intervene earlier, offer increased family support thereby preventing the need for care where possible. As part of our ongoing Children's review, we are increasing social work capacity to work with families and support a return to home. We are also increasing capacity and resilience in our current fostering team. We want to provide more short term/respite/short stay provision to support families and via a regional approach identify improved commissioning and market management. We want to support more children to leave care for other permanence options – going home, Special Guardianship or adoption. This will involve internal expansion and expansion alongside Spark of Genius. Our aim is to provide more provision to support families and manage shorter periods in care. Our proposals, recently shared with cabinet were as follows:

- Change the use of Oakview, one of our current medium to long term children's homes into a short stay facility working alongside Tilery our current 'Turnaround' home.
- Develop a new 3-4 bedded provision in the Thornaby area to work alongside 'Our Place'.
- Complete ongoing work on Bishopton Road – a 4 bedroomed medium to long term residential children's home.
- Develop a new 'edge of secure' approach – up to 3 smaller provisions managed as one.
- Spark of Genius to develop a 4th Children' home based on the same lines as their current model i.e., medium to long term residential care.
- Spark of Genius to develop a 5th home for children and young people with autism and learning difficulties.
- Develop a longer-term option for purpose-built provision with attached school. Exploration is planned to consider the feasibility of this model jointly with Darlington.

This is an ambitious programme of change and is not without challenges:

- We are seeing staffing challenges emerge in terms of our ability to recruit experienced residential Children's Homes Managers and staff.
- There may be community opposition to any new development.
- We need to ensure that we can secure the right provision for us at the right price.

More Stuff Like This Please (MSLTP)

Our ongoing partnership with the ARC continues to offer arts activities to young people living in Stockton on Tees who are involved in the care system. Funded by Stockton Borough Council, examples of some activities recently offered or are planned to be, include:

- Junior taster sessions, commencing 23 February 2022 (10am-1pm) offering short sessions in drama storytelling and movement.
- Film Club commenced 11 January 2022 (4pm-5.30pm) airing SHREK (U) the movie. Shrek embarks on a journey with a donkey to rescue Princess Fiona from a vile lord and regain his swamp.
- Sculpturing, 18 January – 15 February (4pm-6pm) offering 5 weeks of learning to make sculptures with everything from Lego, 3D pens to clay and more!

OFSTED 2 day focussed visit feedback/reflection

A 2-day focussed OFSTED visit was undertaken on 7 and 8 December 2021. Inspectors focussed on the Local Authority's arrangements for planning and achieving permanence for children. This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of Local Authority's children's services (ILACS) framework.

Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including children's electronic case records, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior leaders. In addition, Inspectors spoke to a range of staff including political members, our local senior judge and social workers.

Main findings:

- It was recognised that COVID rates within Stockton were considerably higher than the national average and that senior leaders had recognised the impact on restrictions for our most vulnerable children by responding swiftly to the impact for them. Throughout this period children were found to have received face to face visits with Social Workers being supported to work flexibly. Despite the pandemic, Inspectors found that senior leaders continued to focus their efforts on ensuring that children in their care achieved permanence.
- When children enter care, permanence planning was found to begin swiftly. Good quality and timely assessments completed by Social Workers provided detailed analysis as to why children had become looked after. A range of alternative options for children are considered at the earliest opportunity and for many children this planning began before they entered care through a well-managed Public Law Outline (PLO) process. It was recognised that the weekly PLO panel, introduced since our last inspection in 2019, provided an efficient forum for senior managers to oversee decision making regarding permanence planning for children whilst also ensuring that plans for children are well informed and timely.
- The inspectors found that Social Workers know their children extremely well. Competent Social Workers recognise and respond well to children's needs arising from diversity. They develop meaningful relationships with children through frequent and purposeful visits with direct work being undertaken using a variety of tools. This means that children are assisted to understand and contribute to their plans and are helped to prepare for future care arrangements. Social Workers were found to be determined that their children

experience timely, high quality care arrangements. Social workers were also felt to be very committed to seek alternative care arrangements with family and friends as an alternative to foster care. When children require a placement away from home, careful consideration is given as to how foster carers and residential providers can meet their needs. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are exceptionally well matched.

- When adoption is being considered for children, competent and child centred social work assessments inform these plans. Increased consideration of foster to adopt placements and oversight of pre-birth planning is ensuring that children are provided with continuity of care.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) were found to provide strong oversight of children's progress and there was evidence of challenge. Children's reviews are thorough and articulate clear recommendations which identify a range of timely options when assisting children to achieve permanence.
- A stable and focussed leadership team is driving progress in areas of permanence for children. Children's services in Stockton are well supported by strong corporate and political backing. The inspectors found that elected members provide scrutiny, challenge and support to senior leaders through oversight of data and information.
- Strong strategic relationships are established with the local judiciary assisted by senior leaders' contributions to the local Family Justice Board. The judiciary report that improved decision making is informing assessments and applications to care.
- Social Workers reported that they felt very supported, and that senior leaders and managers were visible. Social Workers felt that caseloads were generally manageable. Supervisions were considered 'brief', and our current audit activity tended to be too focussed on process and compliance. Work is ongoing to improve practice and activity in these areas.

What needs to improve?

The timelessness and quality of the assessment of regulation 24 carers. This is where children are placed with a connected carer and are assessed as being a CIOC and where an assessment of that carer had not been fully completed. In part this was due to capacity issues which have been addressed as part of our ongoing Children's Review. We have since sought legal advice around these children and have a new procedure in place giving the Local Authority 5 working days in which to complete an assessment. We were aware of these children and had robust monitoring processes in place.

The inspectors noted that some of our case supervisions could, at times, be brief and felt that our audits were too focussed on process and compliance. Increased Team Manager capacity in our Social Work teams, already planned as part of our Children's review, will allow Managers to spend more time on supervisions, improving quality, reflection, challenge and planning. Work had already commenced around our audit programme to improve effectiveness. Whilst the audit tool itself is being reviewed, practice 'weeks' are to be proposed to support wider scrutiny and learning.

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22 January 2022