



Children in Our Care Strategic Group (CIOCSG)

Update Report for Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) 8 April 2022

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CIOC and Care Leavers action plan – progress

Priority 2. Improve outcomes and life chances, with focus on,

2.4 Cultural experiences

We continue to develop our 'More stuff Like This Please' (MSLTP) model with our lead cultural partner ARC. Representatives from ARC are now attending various meetings and forums - Fostering team meetings, Foster Care support groups and Stockton Parent Forum, in order to link in with activities and make connections with our CIOC and Care Leavers.

10k contribution by the Council has been match funded by ARC resulting in further delivery of activities:

- Care to Dance – A class offering a great opportunity to learn contemporary and street dance.
- Early Years Music making – An opportunity for our younger CIOC to enjoy fun and -playful sessions incorporating songs, music, movement singing and dance.
- Creative Activities - Aimed at the 8–11-year-old CIOC this 4-week course offers activities including drama, character design, script writing and crafting.
- Film Club - This month's film is Encanto and can be enjoyed by all of our CIOC (under 11 years must be accompanied by an adult).

MSLTP have recently shared some 'Significant Change' stories – feedback from CIOC and some of their carers, about the impact that attending activities offered by ARC have had. These include raising self-esteem, improving social skills, making new friends, improved confidence at school. The children themselves have described being excited about attending activities, happy to have made new friends and love learning new skills – especially learning to bake!

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

3.3 Design/redesign/commission and procedure new therapeutic provision for CIOC, Edge of Care and their families, based on need and demand.

Whilst we remain fully committed to expanding our ambitious Residential Homes programme, we have had to review the use of one of our current Children's homes due to increased demands in relation to external providers increasingly giving immediate notice to those CIOC who display risky behaviours. Our Place will therefore be used, on a short-term basis, for emergency placements on a short-term basis, with staff offered additional training in order to manage some of the very challenging and complex behaviours many of these young people display. We are also working with HR looking at market forces and other incentives in order to improve recruitment and retention of residential homes staff in what is a very competitive market. Challenges do remain in the recruitment of residential staff and, in recruiting registered children's homes managers with the experience to satisfy OFSTED regulations and registration.

3.4 Fostering

The Mockingbird Model

Work continues to develop the Mockingbird Model – this is a global award winning and pioneering programme led by the Fostering Network in the UK. Its aim is to deliver sustainable foster carer through an evidenced based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. Briefings are being prepared for Members, Officers and Partners and will be rolled out prior to implementation.

How will we assess impact?

- Improved Placement stability – reduced placement breakdown.
- A network of strong and authentic relationships to replicate the support offered by an extended family.
- Improved experience of peer support.
- Improved sibling contact.
- Improved process and experience of respite care.
- Improved skills, confidence and role satisfaction for foster carers.
- Improved levels of care retention and recruitment.
- A strong robust and resilient structure to support children, young people and fostering families through times of crisis and transition.
- Improved experience of birth family contact.
- Costs saved and costs avoided.

Children's Services Review

As part of the Children's Services Review and in support of our CIOC Action Plan, significant additional resources were identified to increase capacity within our Fostering teams. We have had a very successful recruitment campaign and have now recruited to nearly all of our new posts. This additional capacity will provide additional support to our Foster Carers, and it is anticipated will further enable CIOC who cannot remain with or return to birth parents to reside within their existing communities.

Priority 4 – Develop and communicate our vision, embed our approach and intent

4.3 Identifying clear corporate parenting roles and opportunities including our 'no limits' programme.

Contracts are currently being reviewed for our Independent Visitors scheme. We are also developing an in-house scheme where a handbook has been designed and a training programme developed. This is to ensure that the Independent Visitors scheme is understood – it is a scheme whereby Members, Officers and wider Corporate Parents can regularly spend time and befriend a CIOC. Our 'No Limits' project are currently working on this scheme to identify specific roles for members and council officers in their role as corporate parents.

Our commissioned 'Family Action' service already have volunteers and we are in the process of also linking these volunteers into the visiting scheme.

Our 'No Limits' group are currently involved in supporting our Care Leavers in preparations for their school proms. Due to COVID we haven't had proms for a couple of years but now restrictions have been lifted these events are going ahead this year to celebrate the end of formal education. While this is an exciting time for our Care Leavers, it is also very expensive purchasing prom dresses, suits, makeup, hair and accessories and we do know that many of our Foster Carers and Connected Carers (Family and Friends) will struggle to meet these costs.

It is planned that we will ask if any of our Corporate Parents have prom dresses or suits that they would be happy to re-cycle, using KYIT as a means of communication. The plan was to use Norton Road as a point of contact, where young people can make an appointment and come along with their carer to choose a dress or suit, make a small donation which could go to charity. Some of our young people are very shy and self-conscious and would feel very uncomfortable about trying on outfits in a shop – we have some staff who are keen to be involved in this scheme and would make the whole experience very special for our Care Leavers.

Since initially sharing this scheme, we have had a very positive response and are currently looking for a unit to house the prom dresses and suits due to Norton Road likely being too small.

It is planned to use some of our 'No Limits' funding to purchase accessories such as shoes, bags and corsage's.

Priority 5 – Improve outcomes for care experienced (Care Leavers) by focussing on:

5.1 Refreshing our Care Leavers Offer

Development around the offer was paused due to our new website going live and recruitment as a result of our ongoing Children's Services Review. However, documents are now developed so they are more widely accessible. Work is underway around comparisons to other Local Authorities to see how our offer compares, what else might or could be offered and what successful marketing looks like. Our new website will now be able to tell us how many Care Leavers access the offer, with renewed analysis supporting better understanding of impact.

5.7 Ensure that we continue to keep in touch and engage with Care Leavers

We have now completed a successful recruitment campaign with new 'keeping in touch' workers now in post. This will improve our knowledge of where our care leavers are, ensuring that they are safe, and their needs are being met.

5.10 Establish a multi-agency approach to post eighteen plans

New pathway teams have now been established with a particular focus being on our 18+ Care Leavers. An employment engagement officer has successfully been recruited with the purpose of supporting employers to understand some of the barriers/vulnerabilities that can be faced by our Care Leavers. A task and finish group are continuing to focus on improving job opportunities and work experience for Care Leavers, including how to prepare for interviews. Recent data indicates that we have an increased number of Care Leavers offered work experience within the Council and obtaining apprenticeships.

CIOC

Our numbers of CIOC are 577. Whilst this is still higher than we would want and can maintain long term, these numbers have remained static over the last 2 years (including during the pandemic).

OFSTED have recently inspected one of our Children's Homes – Piper House- which has maintained a judgement of 'outstanding' for a number of years now. I am very pleased to share that they again received an 'outstanding' judgement, an indication of the hard work and commitment of all those involved. Feedback from the children and young people themselves was particularly positive.

Our current judgements for our internal homes are:

- Piper House – Outstanding
- Tilery – Outstanding
- Rose House – Good
- Hartburn – Good
- Ayton – Good

- Our Place – RI (this was primarily due to staffing levels around a particularly high-risk young person who was placed in an emergency)
- Oak House – RI (this was primarily around recording issues rather than any safeguarding concerns).

In response to the judgements for Our Place and Oak House, we have put in immediate and robust action plans with a clear commitment to improving the judgements in these two homes.

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25 March 2022