



Derby City Council

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
22 September 2015

ITEM 9

Report of the Acting Strategic Director for
Children and Young People

Exit from Care Team

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Exit from Care Team was created to assist in the reduction of the number of children in care to Derby City Local Authority and to reduce placement costs. The team became operational on 7th January 2013 and initially consisted of 3 full time social workers, a full time team manager and a team clerk (now Casework Support Officer). An additional full time social worker post was created in September 2014 taking the team to 4 FTEs.
- 1.2 The primary purpose of the team's existence is to support the successful transition of children from the care system to the care of their parents, carers or connected persons. This may be achieved in three ways:
 - Placement of a voluntarily accommodated child (S.20) with his/her parent or relative.
 - Placement of a looked after child with his/her parent under the 'Placement with Parent Regulations'.
 - Supporting a long term foster carer gaining a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order for the child.
- 1.3 A referral for an assessment of reunification or notification that a foster carer wishes to apply to the court for a CAO or SGO in respect of a child may be made by social workers, IROs, residential care workers, fostering workers, managers or by young people themselves.
- 1.4 The vast majority of referrals are received from the Children in Care teams where there are good working relationships between the Exit team members and managers. In addition to this there is also a good working relationship between the Exit team and the Independent Reviewing Officers that assist assessments for reunifications being referred from the statutory Looked after Children's reviews.

RECOMMENDATION

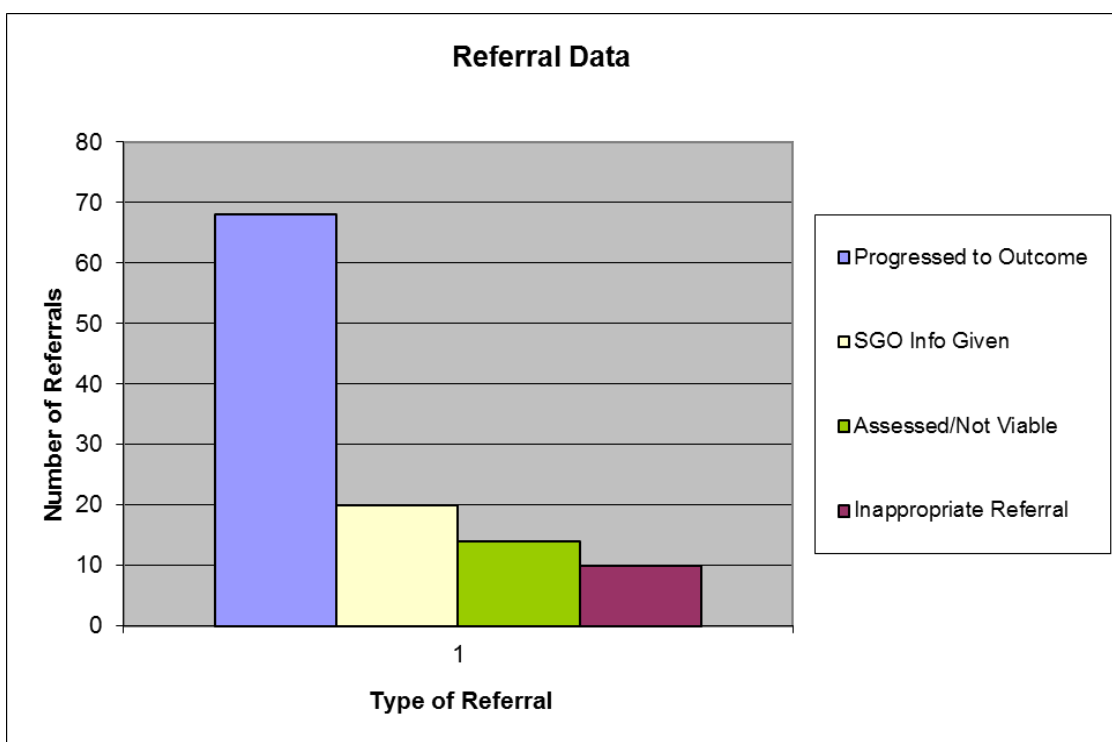
- 2.1 That the board notes and endorses the work of the Exit team to safely reduce the number of Looked After Children and to reduce placement costs.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The original ethos of the team remains, for the social workers to hold lower case loads in order for them to undertake good quality, timely, thorough assessments to determine if the exit plan is viable. If so, the social worker is then able to undertake good quality direct work with the family to prepare for the transition out of care.
- 3.2 The team has a rapid response duty system that allows an immediate response to any rehabilitation crises in family homes by social workers who have the specific expertise and understanding to respond in the most appropriate way.
- 3.3 The children and young people that have been referred to the Exit Team have clearly stated they no longer wish to be 'in care' or have a social worker, and where safe to do so, the voice of the child has been truly heard.
- 3.4 Staff morale has always been high in the team and sickness levels have consistently been very low since the team's inception.

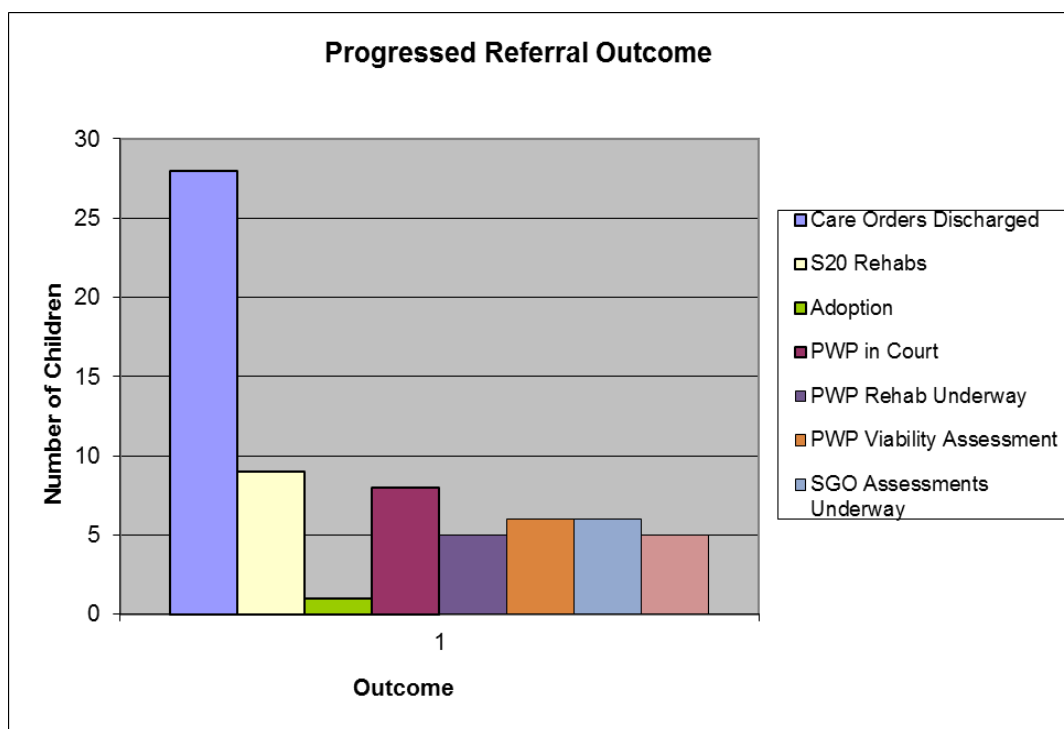
SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 Since starting January 2013 the team have received a total of **112** referrals (individual children). **10** referrals were inappropriate, **14** referrals were assessed and deemed not viable for rehabilitation or discharge of carer order, **20** referrals have seen foster carers informed of the SGO process but resulted in them not wishing to proceed. **68** referrals have moved through the assessment phase and have resulted in differing outcomes for children and young people, or are currently continuing to be assessed.



4.2 Of the 68 progressed referrals:

- **28** children have had their Care Orders discharged and have ceased involvement with Social Care – **11** of these became the subjects of Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Orders to either extended family members or foster carers, **17** children have returned home to a parent and had their Care Orders discharged.
- **9** children who were voluntarily accommodated under Section 2, have returned home and their cases closed to Social Care.
- **1** child who had a failed rehabilitation throughout court proceedings, has successfully been placed for adoption.
- **8** children are currently placed at home with a parent under Placement with Parent Regulations with discharge of Care Order statements currently underway.
- **5** children have recently been placed at home with a parent under Placement with Parent Regulations, with further assessment underway to proceed to discharge their Care Order in the future.
- **6** children are currently undergoing a Single Assessment to determine if rehabilitation home to a parent is viable.
- **5** children are currently awaiting a court hearing in relation to their current carers seeking Special Guardianship Orders – resulting in their Care Orders being discharged.
- **6** assessments are underway to determine if current carers can obtain Special Guardianship Orders – that will result in their Care Order being discharged.



- 4.3 At the end of year one, 31st March 2014, the team achieved savings for the Local Authority for placement costs of **£636,333.05** (total of 15 months savings).

At the end of year two, 31st March 2015, the team achieved savings for the Local Authority for placement costs of **£349,898.20** (total of 12 months savings).

Therefore the total placement saving up until 31st march 2015 was **£986,231.25**.

- 4.4 In addition to the placement savings, **37** children are no longer looked after by the Local Authority and their cases are not open to Social Care. This means, there is an uncalculated saving of a number of professionals on-going time including but not exclusively, Social Worker hours - visiting, recording, organising, IRO time, statutory meeting attendance and LAC medical reviews.
- 4.5 The quality of the assessments and court reports undertaken by the team are written to a very high standard and this has been recognised and commented upon from case file audits, IRO's, Magistrates, District Judges and the local Family Court Judge.
- 4.6 The team are highly committed to ensuring all other options to care are safely considered for children and young people within the care system of Derby City Council.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The team was set up to challenge a prevailing culture of once in care, permanence plans were made until children were 18 years old. It was recognised that to have a team which has a specific remit to exit children from care and is not distracted by other duties and responsibilities would be far more successful at achieving exits from care and changing the existing culture. The success of the team in achieving the number of successful exits from care over the years is apparent and the team has also succeeded in challenging the previous culture and changing it to a certain extent. Therefore, given the success so far, there appears to be no alternative option that would have the impact and continuing ethos of the Exit Team to ensure that not only is there savings within the Local Authority placement costs, but most importantly children and young people are able to Exit the care system safely.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Alison Parkin Maureen Darbon
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List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications
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IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 The Exit team has saved the authority nearly a million pounds in two years in placement costs alone.

Legal

- 2.1 Children in voluntary care (S.20 of the Children Act, 1989) may return home at the request of their parents at any time. It is incumbent upon the Local Authority to assess the suitability of the parents to care for their children and to put a care plan in place to ensure the successful transition home of the children and young people.
- 2.2 Children subject to Care Orders (S. 31 of the Children Act, 1989) may also return to the care of their parents if the Local Authority approves the move on the basis of a positive assessment and on the agreement of the Local Authority's Decision Maker's agreement. These children remain looked after until such time as a court discharges their Care Orders on the application of a parent or the Local Authority. Children over 16 years may also apply to the court for their Care Orders to be discharged.
- 2.3 Foster parents, relatives and other connected persons may apply to the Court to gain Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Orders on children in care who they have been looking after or who they would like to look after. Carers who are successful are entitled to receive allowances from the LA until the children are 18 years. The allowances are pegged to the basic fostering allowance.
- 2.4 The Children Act, 1989 is based on the principle that the vast majority of children are better cared for by their parents and families than by the state. It is incumbent upon LAs to regular consider if a looked after child can be returned to the care of their own families.

Personnel

- 3.1

IT

- 4.1

Equalities Impact

- 5.1