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Children's Permanence Team – Quarter 4 Update Report 2021/22

Purpose

- 1.1 The Exit from Care team was developed in 2013 in response to meeting our sufficiency requirements and ensuring children and young people are cared for in their local communities, with family where possible. From April 2017 to the present day, we have seen an increase in numbers of children exiting long term care and increased cost savings to the Local Authority as a result.
- 1.2 The Exit from Care team is now part of the Children's Permanence Team (CPT), alongside the Children's Adoption element of the team. Work undertaken by the team has had a significant impact on reducing numbers of children in care and in rehabilitating children home. This report provides the Q4 and the 2021/22 annual update on the CPT's progress.
- 1.3 The Exit from Care side of the team, work with children and families/carers to assess if children and young people still need to be in care or if they can safely move to family and friends or live permanently with their foster carers.
- 1.4 The Adoption social workers progress children's plans where it has been agreed that Adoption is in the child's Best Interest. They manage the process to match and place children with approved adopters who will become their legal parents/guardians for the rest of that child's life. This report will show some of the work done by the team and help us decide how we do things in the future.

Recommendation

- 2.1 To ensure Senior Managers and Corporate Parenting Board members are aware of the ongoing performance of the CPT in the following areas:
 - An update on how many children/young people exited care per quarter and the onward forecast.
 - Quarterly staffing updates and forecasts for the next quarter.
 - A report on caseloads, both case responsibility and co working.
 - An update under what arrangements children/young people exited from care.
 - An overview of the financial savings of the team and expected savings forecast.
 - An update on what additional work is being completed in the team.
 - Identification of service strengths and areas for development.

Reason

- 3.1 To ensure senior managers and all Corporate Parenting Board members have a clear line of sight into priority areas of performance for People Services across the year.

Supporting information

- 4.1 The purpose of the Children's Permanence Team is to support the implementation of Derby City Council's Permanence Policy.

All children and young people deserve a secure and stable family home. This must be within a family environment unless there are significant needs that cannot be met within a family placement. Where this cannot be achieved within birth families, there is a duty to provide an alternative permanent home. All children must have a permanency plan where a decision has been made that they cannot live with their birth or extended family within an appropriate timescale to prevent unnecessary drift and delay.

Targets for this financial year 2021/22 identified in the Service Plan for the Children's Permanence Team are:

- Exit 28 children and young people from care through the Exit from Care Team per annum in 2021/22 via: re-unification with family or use of Court Orders such as Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangement Order (CAO).
- Exit 35 children and young people from care through the CPT per annum in 2021/22 via adoption.
- Embed Special Guardianship Order (SGO) tracker and track number of SGOs - measure against benchmark from previous 3 years. Exemption reports to come to Permanence Panel meetings every 3 months.

4.2 Staffing

In Q4 the Children's Permanence Team has consisted of:

- A full-time Team Manager
- 5 full-time Adoption Social Workers
- 1 part-time Independent Birth Family Worker
- 4 full-time Exit Social Workers
- 1 part time Exit Children's Practitioner with a specific role of reviewing Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and Child Arrangement Order (CAO) payments now managed in the Friends and Family Team within the Fostering Service.
- 1 full time Exit Children's Practitioner with a specific role of setting up and delivery of Derby's Post SGO support offer now managed in the Friends and Family Team within the Fostering Service.

4.3 Exit Team workload during Q4 2021/22

Special Guardianship Orders	Total
Referrals stage	6
Progressed to Stage 1	9
Ongoing SGO assessments	10
SGO Panel	5
Progressing to Court	1
SGO Granted	1

Table 1 Special Guardianship Orders Q4

4 referrals have been made for SGO Assessments in Q4 and 2 existing referrals remained at referral stage due to the uncertainty of the carers. 9 cases have remained in or progressed to stage 1. 10 cases have had active SGO Assessments and 5 of these have progressed to panel in Q4. 1 case was awaiting a Court hearing in Q4 and 1 SGO has been granted in Court in Q4.

4.4 Placement with Parents Q4.

Placement with Parents	Q4	Total 2021/22
Referrals	10	25
Initial Viability Assessment	5	11
Full PWP Assessment	6	13
Placed with Parent(s) under Full Care Order	0	7
Returned to LA care	0	2
Revocation of Care Order	0	1

Table 2 Placement with Parents

4.5 During Q4 we received 10 new Placement with Parent referrals. Five of these have now received input from the Exit Social Workers. Two initial viability assessments in Q4 identified that a placement with parents at this time would not be viable. The others are at early stages and Exit Social Workers work jointly with the Children in Care Social Worker to explore if this is a realistic plan for the children.

4.6 The team have progressed 4 Placement with Parents Assessments in Q4, although no children have been exited under Placement with Parents regulations. assessments are progressing.

4.7 Connected Persons

Connected Persons	Total
Referrals	0
Initial Viability Assessment	0
Full Viability Assessment	0

Case Management Decision for Unregulated Placement	0
Placed in the Unregulated Placement	1 (existing case)
Returned to Local Authority Care	0
Child Arrangement Order Granted	0

Table 3 Connected Persons

4.8 The Exit Team have maintained 1 unregulated placement with connected persons during Q4. This young person is secure with his extended family, however these kinship carers do not currently feel confident to progress to a Child Arrangement Order.

4.9 Exits achieved

4.71.1 During Q4 2021/22 the Exit Team exited 1 child from care via a SGO. During 2021/22 in total 12 children were exited from care via SGOs.

4.17.2 During Q4 no children were exited under Placement with Parent's Regulations. Over Q's 1-4, 7 children were supported under Placement with Parents Regulations. Therefore, in total 19 children have exited care in 2021/22 as a result of interventions from the Children's Permanence Team. The Exit Target for 2021/22 was 28 children.

4.10 Projected Exits from Care 2023

4.10.1 During Q1-Q4 we have achieved 19 exits from care, with 2 children returning to care at a later date.

4.10.2 There are a further 9 SGO cases in the early stages of checks and assessments, of which not all will progress to the Assessment stage. 10 cases in Assessment stage. 5 cases have been approved at SGO panel and one case we are waiting for a Court date. Realistically, we expect to achieve 2 more SGOs during Q1 2022/23. At this point we have a further 18 SGOs to progress during 2022/23.

4.10.3 Of the 5 Placement with Parents referrals received in Q2, 4 were assessed as not viable at this time, one case is progressing. During Q3 we received 5 Placement with Parents referrals of which 1 was not viable, 1 has exited under Placement with Parents regulations and 3 are progressing. In all Placement with Parents referrals Exit Social Workers will complete a Single Assessment and make recommendations if appropriate about what work needs to be completed to progress the exit to parents in the future. Parents are provided with actions to complete where appropriate.

4.10.4 The forecast for exits under Placement with Parents during 2022/23 at this point is that there are 12 cases which are progressing positively.

4.10.5 There are no new potential connected persons identified to provide care for children who have a long-term plan of care currently.

4.10.6 The Exit Team has potential to achieve the target of 20 plus exits during 2022/23. Along with progressing SGO referrals we are aiming to

achieve an increased level of reunifications from the previous year. We are planning to deliver early intervention to the Children in Care service to develop longer term plans to achieve reunifications, where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

- 4.10.7 The CPT Team Manager tracks potential SGO placements through identifying stable foster placements via the Derby City Permanence Process and Looked After Review process. There will also be a more robust approach in terms of developing relationships between Children in Care and Exit Teams with regular slots at Children in Care Team Meetings being requested.

4.11 Exit Performance for the last 3 years:

2019-20

9 SGOs granted

4 Reunifications

2020-21

7 SGOs granted

5 Reunifications

2 Kinship Care

2021/22

12 SGOs granted

7 reunifications

4.12 Service strengths and areas for development

- 4.12.1 The team has experienced a period of instability in terms of staffing and one post has now been recruited to.

- 4.12.2 The team have enjoyed being part of the wider CPT and have also been supportive of work pressures within the Children in Care and Locality services, including picking up statutory duties and full allocation of cases earlier than would normally be expected. It has also been agreed that Exit Social Workers will support Children in Care duty to continue building working relationships and reciprocal support at pressured times.

4.13 Areas of development:

- 4.13.1 Work alongside the Friends and Family teams to ensure consistency of support the Local Authority offers SGO carers post order.
- 4.13.2 Work closely with the Children in Care Service to explore the use of CAO's as a way of exiting children to the care of Kinship carers.
- 4.13.3 Developing a focus on considering absent fathers as potential carers for their children will be taken forward in 2021/22. Training is being planned for the Exit Team Social Workers in Family Group Conferences, as recommended in the 2020 Family Justice Council paper.

4.14 Adoption

4.14.1 The Children Act 1989, the Adoption Agency Regulations (2011), the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Education and Adoption Act 2016 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 placed duties and responsibilities on Local Authorities to provide or arrange to provide an Adoption Service.

4.14.2 This section of the report provides adoption performance information for the period 2021/22 Q4.

In April 2020, the adoption team from Derby City Council became part of the newly formed Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption East Midlands (AEM.) The Local Authorities making up AEM are Derby City, Derbyshire, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire. All adoption recruitment, assessment, home finding and support after adoption services transferred to AEM.

4.15 Caseloads

4.15.1 At the end of Q4 2021/22 there were 58 children with a plan of adoption. 51 of these were allocated within the Adoption Team. The Team were tracking 36 cases with either a decision of Planning for Adoption, but where the Placement Order has not yet been granted, or where this was a possibility. There were 16 cases where the Adoption Order has been granted.

4.15.3 An additional Adoption Social Work post in CPT was agreed as part of the Demand Management invest to save approach agreed by DMT, it was planned that the team would have capacity to pick up pre-birth and proceedings.

4.15.4 Monthly tracking meetings are held with the Team Manager and Adoption East Midlands (AEM) Home Finders and these cases are tracked to ensure that the CPT Social Workers and AEM Home Finders are ready to progress the child's plan of Adoption at the point of a Placement Order being granted.

4.16 Somerset Judgement

4.16.1 In March 2021, in a family proceedings case in Somerset, it was identified that a child's permanence report (CPR) did not contain a medical summary that was compliant with regulation 17 of the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (AARs 2005). The Designated Family Judge ordered the Local Authority to review compliance with regulation 15 and 17 of the AARs 2005 for all children subject to Placement Orders. The compliance review in Somerset identified additional children's cases which were not compliant with regs 15 and/or 17 of the AARs 2005, the matter was referred to the High Court for review.

4.16.2 The Somerset Judgement called for all LAs to review compliance under Adoption Regulations. Derby City Adoption Agency became aware of this issue at the beginning of February 2022 and undertook a review in partnership with Health, Adoption East Midlands and through

discussions with HHJ Williscroft, where actions were agreed to ensure compliancy with reg. 15 and reg. 17 of the AAR 2005.

4.16.3 The President of the Family Division Sir Andrew McFarlane handed down his final judgement on 13.4.22 to Local Authorities for the *Somerset* case. It is available [here](#).

4.16.4 The Somerset Judgement has resulted in a delay in progressing children's plans during Q4 2021/22 and will impact on adoption performance as we progress into 2022/23.

4.17 Numbers of children in progress and the specific number in each stage of the adoption process

4.17.1 Best Interest (BI) (Agency Decision Maker) decisions:

Q1-Q3 2022, 23 BI Decisions have been recorded.
There were 10 Best Interest Decisions recorded in Q4 2021/22
Therefore, during 2021/22, 33 BI have been recorded.

During Q1-Q3 2021/22, 24 Placement Orders were granted.
There were 8 Placement Order's granted in Q4.
Therefore, over Q1-Q4 2021/22, 32 Placement Orders have been granted.

There have been 2 reversals during Q1-Q2 where the plan is no longer adoption. There has been 1 reversal in Q4 making 3 in total during 2021/22.

4.18 Home finding

4.18.1 Due to the Somerset Judgement Home Finding was paused between 2 February 2022 and 31 March 2022.

4.18.2 During Q4 2021/22 we were actively home finding for 21 children. Of these 10 children were linked, 2 were matched. One child was placed in their adoptive placement during Q4, and 2 children were placed under Foster for Adoption Regulations.

4.18.3 During Q4 home finding has included 1 sibling group of 2.

4.19 Children placed

4.19.1 During Q4 there was a significant reduction in the number of children placed into their adoptive placements due to the impact of the Somerset Judgement.

4.19.2 Of the 1 child placed under Adoption Regulations and the 3 children placed under Foster for Adoption Regulations during Q4, all the adopters were from Adoption East Midlands.

4.19.3 During Q1-Q4 2021/22 we have placed 23 children for Adoption in total. This falls short of our target of 35, again placing only one child during

Q4 is a direct impact of the Somerset Judgement as between the beginning of February to the end of March we were unable to place children into their adoptive placements.

4.20 Adoption Orders

There were 21 Adoption Orders granted in Q1-Q3 and 13 Adoption Orders granted during Q4. In total there were 34 Adoption Orders granted during 2021/22.

4.21 The numbers exiting care via adoption this quarter and this year to date

Between Q1-Q3 2021/22 22 children were placed in their adoptive placement. During Q4 due to the impact of the Somerset Judgement only 1 child was placed in their adoptive placement, making 23 in total 2021/22. With 3 children placed under Foster for Adoption regulations.

4.22 Projected adoptions for Q1 2022/23

4.22.1 At the end of Q4 2021/22, there were 76 cases open with a Best Interest Decision (BID), where the BID was made at any date prior to 1 January 2022, who were still in the adoption process (i.e., child with BID where the BID had not been reversed by end of Q3 2021/22 or the child had not been adopted by end Q3 2021/22).

4.22.2 Children's Permanence Team's target is to exit 35 children and young people from care through the CPT per annum in 2022/23 via adoption.

4.22.3 Based on the number of children who we have linked, matched or placed under Foster for Adoption Regulations at the end of Q4, we project to place a further 14 children into their adoptive placements by the end of Q1 2022/23.

Public/stakeholder engagement

5.1 N/A.

Other options

6.1 N/A.

Financial and value for money issues

7.1 No additional resource required/or other financial issues to note.

Legal implications

8.1 None.

Climate implications

9.1 None.

Other significant implications

10.1 None.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal		
Finance	Janice Hadfield, Head of Finance	22.06.22
Service Director(s)	Suanne Lim, Director of Early Help & Children's Social Care	04.07.22
Report sponsor	Suanne Lim, Director of Early Help & Children's Social Care	04.07.22
Other(s)		

Background papers:

List of appendices: