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Early Help and Children's Social Care

Exit from Care - Children's Permanence Team – Quarter 2 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 a routine quarterly update on the CPT's progress and strategy for the 1st quarter of 2021-22.
- 1.3 The Exit from Care element 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.

Recommendations

- 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 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 the arrangements young people exited from care.
- An update on what additional work is being completed in the team.
- Identification of service strengths and areas for development.

Reasons

- 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, 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 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 via adoption.
- Embed Special Guardianship Order (SGO) tracker and track number of SGO's - measure against the benchmark from the previous 3

years. Exemption reports to come to Permanence Panel meetings every 3 months.

Staffing

4.2 In Q2 the Children's Permanence Team has consisted of:

- A full-time Team Manager.
- 4 full-time Adoption Social Workers
- 1 full-time Adoption social worker vacancy
- 1 part-time Independent Birth Family Worker
- 2 full-time Exit Social Worker vacancies.
- 1 full-time Exit Social Worker.
- 2 part time Exit Social Workers who make up X 1 FTE post.
- 1 part time Exit from Care Children's Practitioner with a specific role of reviewing Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and Child Arrangement Order (CAO) payments.

In September 2020 we were successful in recruiting an additional Social Worker and a full-time Children's Practitioner (this role is included in the above bullet points) who started in the team in December 2020. The funding for these posts came from the 'Invest to Save' as part of a demand management approach agreed by DMT in June 2020.

Towards the end of Q1 as part of the Fostering restructure the 1.5 FTE Children's Practitioner Posts relating to the Post SGO Support transferred to the Friends and Family Team, based in the Fostering Service. The Exit Team continues to receive arm's length SGO Support via the existing 0.5 Children's Practitioner, however this post is no longer line managed within the Exit Team.

] The Exit Team had 2 full time vacancies which were recruited to part way through Q2. Two part time social workers left the team part way through Q2 and the recruitment process for this post is ongoing. It is anticipated that this post will be filled by the end of Q3. Capacity in the Exit Team has therefore been reduced by 50 % for the majority of Q2. This may impact performance during Q3 due to the reduced capacity to pick up new work in Q2.

In the Adoption Team one full-time social worker resigned, prior to this they were absent from work, therefore the Adoption team capacity has been reduced by 20% during Q2. To prevent delay in permanence plans for

children, an agency social worker has been recruited until the permanent social worker is recruited. It is anticipated that the full-time permanent post will be filled by the end of Q3.

Caseloads

4.3 During Q2 2021-22, the Exit Team collectively had:

- Case responsibility for 17 cases as the responsible Social Worker.
- Co-worked 14 cases as assessor.

Exit Team workload during Q2, 2021-22

4.4 Special Guardianship Orders Q2

| Special Guardianship Orders | Total |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Referrals | 12 |
| Progressed to Stage 1 | 8 |
| Ongoing SGO assessments | 9 |
| Permanence Panel | 0 |
| Progressing to Court | 2 |
| SGO Granted | 8 |

Table 1 SGO's

12 referrals have been made for SGO Assessments in Q2. Of these, 8 have progressed to stage 1. 9 cases have had active SGO Assessments which should progress to permanence panel in Q3.

We have taken 0 cases to permanence panel in Q2. The low numbers demonstrate the impact of the 50% reduction in staffing for the majority of Q2.

We have 2 cases awaiting Court hearings in Q2.

The Exit Social Worker (we have had in the team during Q2) has continued assessing two children for SGO's to be awarded to a relative. This is Court directed and the children have not previously been in care. This work was picked up from locality during 2020-21 and will not provide a saving for the LA.

8 SGO's have been granted in Court in Q2.

Placement with Parents

4.5

| Placement with Parents | Total |
|---|-------|
| Referrals | 5 |
| Initial Viability Assessment | 2 |
| Full PWP Assessment | 3 |
| Placed with Parent(s) under Full Care Order | 3 |
| Returned to LA care | 0 |
| Revocation of Care Order | 0 |

Table 2 Placement with Parents

During Q2 we received 4 new Placement with Parent referrals, plus one which did not progress due to staffing. All of these have now received input from the Exit Social Workers. These are at early stages and Exit Social Workers are working jointly with the Children in Care Social Worker to explore if this is a realistic plan for the children.

We have two existing cases which have progressed, the Exit Social Worker (we have had in the team during Q2) now holds case responsibility.

The team have completed 3 Placement with Parents Assessments in Q2 and have exited these 3 children under Placement with Parents regulations.

Exit Placement with Parents work could not access additional input from the SIBs project (Stars) for these 3 Placement with Parents cases due to:

1. Overlap with the commissioned Action for Children service
2. A child being out of area.
3. A child being too young for the Stars service.

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 |
| Returned to Local Authority Care | 0 |
| Child Arrangement Order Granted | 0 |

Table 3 Connected Persons

- 4.6 The Exit Team have maintained 1 unregulated placement with connected persons during Q2. This young person continues to thrive with his extended family and work to progress to a Child Arrangement Order will commence in Q3.

Exits achieved

During Q2 2021-22 the Exit Team have exited 8 children from care on SGO's and 3 children under Placement with Parents Regulations. During Q1 one child was exited via a SGO. This is a total of 12 exits midway through 2021-22.

4.7 Projected Exits from care 2021 -22

We hope to achieve a further 2 SGO's during Q 3-4 2021-22.

There are a further 20 SGO cases at the early stages of checks and assessments which we will progress during 2021-22.

In addition to this we received 6 requests to complete initial Placement with Parents checklists during Q2 2021-22. These are all at early stages, these cases will be tracked by the Exit Social Workers.

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

The Exit Team has potential to achieve the target of 28 exits during 2021-22. 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.

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.

4.10 Service Strengths and Areas for Development

The team has experienced a period of instability in terms of staffing and a period of recruitment has been and remains underway. The team had a new manager during the last quarter of 2020-21 who will continue to drive forward the business plan, whilst building new relationships with the team.

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.

4.11 Areas of development include:

Work alongside the Friends and Family teams to ensure consistency of support the Local Authority offers SGO carers post order. This needs to be clear via the Derby City Council website so that we are open and transparent regarding our services offer.

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.

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 Meeting approaches, as recommended in the 2020 Family Justice Council paper.

5 Adoption

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 This section of the report provides adoption performance information for the period Q2 2021-22.
- 5.3 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.

Caseloads

- 5.4 At the end of Q2 2021-22 there were 62 children with a plan of adoption. 53 of these were allocated within the Adoption Team. The Team were tracking a further 30 cases with a plan of planning for Adoption, but where the Placement Order has not yet been granted. There were a further 13 cases where the Adoption Order has been granted but there are outstanding tasks to complete before the case can be closed. It is not straight forward to calculate caseloads as the team had a 20 % reduced capacity for most of Q2. However, Children's Permanence Social Workers have been unable to write Child Permanence Report's (CPR's) prior to a Placement Order being made on behalf of the allocated Locality social worker due to demand. All requests to co-work cases during Q2 were agreed.
- 5.5 Occasionally cases are co-worked in CPT due to case responsibility being with Children in Care Social Workers, when care plans change from one of adoption to one of long-term fostering, in which case, CIC Social Workers hold case responsibility for the case whilst the CPT Social Workers apply to the courts for the revocation of the Placement Order. We have not undertaken any of this activity in Q2.
- 5.6 An additional social work post in CPT was agreed as part of the Demand Management invest to save approach, it was planned that the team would have capacity to pick up pre-birth and proceedings work. We are progressing 1 case under the Pre-Birth Protocol. This has impacted on capacity to continue to support the writing of CPR's. Consideration will need to be given to retaining the specialism of the Adoption Team to ensure the Adoption Social Worker's expertise is maximised and their focus is on progressing plans for children who have an agreed plan of adoption.
- 5.7 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.

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

- 5.8 Best Interest (BI) (Agency Decision Maker) decisions:

A total of 6 BI decisions were made in Q1. However, in the previous report for Q1, 2BI Decisions were reported. This was due to a range of reasons, such as late submission of data into LCS.

At the time of writing this report BI Decisions for Q2 is 5.

Therefore, 11 Q1 and Q2 aggregated 11 BI Decisions have been recorded. This may be amended once all the data has been inputted for Q2.

The previous report stated that a total of 2 Placement Orders (PO's) were made in Q1. Due to late submissions of Data, this has now been reviewed to 6 PO's granted in Q1.

At the time of writing this report PO's granted in Q2 is 8.

Therefore over Q1-Q2, 14 Placement Orders have been granted. This may be amended once all the data has been inputted for Q2.

There was been one reversal during Q1 where the plan is no longer adoption. No reversals during Q2.

5.9 Home finding:

In Q2 we were actively home finding for 24 children. Of these 10 children have been linked, 2 have been matched and 3 have been placed. With 9 remaining who we are still actively home finding for.

During Q2 home finding has included 4 sibling groups of 2, of which 3 sibling groups we have either linked or matched. 1 sibling group of 2 we are still home finding for. Home finding for one of the sibling groups of 2 has now been separated to home finding for the siblings individually. There is a sibling group of 4 where the home finding plan is 2 groups of 2.

During Q2 there are 7 children including a sibling group of 2 who we have not been home finding for due to a range of reasons.

5.10 Children placed:

In Q2, we have placed 8 children into their adoptive placements.

Of the 8 children we placed in Q2, 1 was placed via an agency other than Adoption East Midlands.

Over Q1and2, we have placed 10 children for Adoption in total.

5.11 Adoption Orders:

There were 11 Adoption Orders granted in Q1. There were 6 Adoption Orders granted in Q2 making 17 Adoption Orders so far in 2021-22.

The numbers exiting care via adoption this quarter and this year to date and from which type of provision Adoption Order made

- 5.12 There is a financial saving for the department for cases exited in Q1 and Q2 via adoption, with 2 children being placed in their adoptive placement during Q1 and 8 children placed in Q2 making 10 children placed so far in 2021-22.

Projected adoptions for Q3, 2021-22

- 5.13 As at the end of Q2, there were 67 cases open with a Best Interest Decision (BID), where the BID was made at any date prior to 1st October 2021, who were still in the adoption process (i.e., child with BID where the BID had not been reversed by end of Q2 or the child had not been adopted by end Q2).

The Children's Permanence Team's target is to exit 35 children and young people from care through the CPT per annum in 2021-22 via adoption.

Based on the number of children who we have linked and matched in Q2, we project to achieve another 12 placements before the end of Q3. This would provide a total of 22 placements by the end of Q3.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 6.1 N/A.

Other options

- 7.1 N/A.

Financial and value for money issues

- 8.1 No additional resource required/other financial issues to note.

Legal implications

- 9.1 No Implications.

Other significant implications

- 10.1 None.

This report has been approved by the following people:

| Role | Name | Date of sign-off |
|--|------------|------------------|
| Legal Finance Service Director Report sponsor Other(s) | Andy Smith | 01/12/2021 |

Background papers:
List of appendices: