

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	<b>The BCP Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Improvement Journey</b>
Meeting date	28 July 2020
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>In November 2019, Ofsted undertook a focussed visit in respect of planning for permanence for children in BCP.</p> <p>The outcome of this inspection highlighted a number of areas of improvement which are summarised in our Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan.</p> <p>The improvement plan was updated in light of the inspection outcomes and progress is overseen through the BCP Quality Performance Improvement Board.</p> <p>The Corporate Parenting Board is the governance board which oversees the BCP Corporate Parenting Strategy. This report offers an update in relation to the progress being made for children and actions in place to improve our service delivery to children in BCP.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>The Board takes note of the progress being made in relation to services for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	As Corporate parents the Board will wish to have oversight, assurance and hold to account the service in relation to the improvement journey for Children in Care and Care Experienced young people.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Sandra Moore, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families
Corporate Director	Judith Ramsden, Corporate Director for Children's Services
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Wards	All wards
Classification	Public

## **Background**

### **Update on Progress Since the Ofsted Focussed Visit in November 2019**

The Ofsted focussed visit highlighted the areas of improvement below:

- **Permanence planning for children, including the use of parallel planning so that they achieve permanence at a time that is right for them.**
- **The quality of care plans so that they reflect children's current needs and circumstances and are informed by up-to-date, comprehensive needs assessments.**
- **The effectiveness of management oversight that ensures timely permanence for children.**
- **The range and choice of placements to meet children's needs and support permanency planning.**
- **Scrutiny of permanence planning by independent reviewing officers so that children have timely and well-considered plans for permanence that progress.**

This report will address progress against each of the above within the headings provided below and will also consider the wider issues for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People.

- Permanence planning (including oversight, planning and scrutiny)
- Quality of Care Plans
- The Range and Choice of Placements
- Response to Covid 19
- Health of Children in Care
- Exploitation and Missing Episodes
- Education Training and Employment

### **Permanence planning**

1. In relation to effective management oversight of permanency planning for children in care, a Permanency Planning & Tracking Panel now meets weekly to review and drive

planning for children and young people in care. By the end of June 2020 85.7% of children who have reached their 2nd review have a proposed permanence plan.

2. To date 252 children have had their plan for permanency scrutinised with the relevant Team and Service Managers, and actions set are reviewed on rotation. The meeting is chaired by the Service Director, Children's Social Care to ensure managers maintain focus on permanence planning for children.
3. Data for May indicated a 12% increase in Permanence Plans on the April/Q4 end figures.
4. As permanency planning identifies children in long term placements who will benefit from the stability offered by being matched to their carers, additional Fostering Panels have been put in place to speed up the process of ratifying long-term matching of children.
5. Independent reviewing officers (IRO's) are a key component in identifying and addressing areas of drift in permanency planning and upholding standards of practice. IRO Alerts and Escalations are now tracked via performance monitoring and figures show increased evidence of intervention, with 21 alerts raised in May. These related, as examples, to timely permanence planning, education provision and availability of reports for LAC Reviews.
6. The IRO Service Improvement Plan also highlights the requirement for reviewing officers to have ongoing oversight between review meetings to prevent drift. The Team Manager for the IRO Service sits on the Permanency Planning and Tracking Panel to ensure additional oversight on the progress of care plans from the perspective of the reviewing officers.
7. The Pre-Proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline is a key area for early permanency work to be undertaken and the PLO Process is currently under review. Tracking processes to ensure close oversight on children subject to PLO cases has been reviewed to ensure statutory timescales are maintained. In addition, the Service Director has created a dedicated slot for PLO scrutiny on a monthly basis at the Care & Resource Panel.
8. Webinar training sessions have been designed and delivery has started for all teams focussing on effective permanency planning from an early stage.

### **Next Steps**

9. Continued review of the permanency planning for the entire children in care and care experienced population to maintain momentum and focus on timely permanence.
10. Performance standards are being developed to ensure timeliness, effectiveness and quality of public law outline process.
11. Webinar training sessions to continue throughout the summer and to be part of all social work induction programmes so all teams are focussing on effective permanency planning from an early stage.

### **Care Plans and quality of Care Plans**

12. Care Plans are "living" documents that speak to the child's ongoing and evolving needs and regular updating is key to their impact in these areas, so children in care need their plans regularly updated. As of May 2020, 92% (463/503) of children in care had a care plan. This has been addressed with managers and teams. As at 2nd July 2020 95.2%

(476/500) had a care plan recorded and signed off. Action plans have been put in place to ensure all remaining children have a care plan signed off by 17.7.20.

### **Next Steps**

13. An increased focus on quality. We have already introduced mentoring and support to managers which focusses on what 'Good' looks like' and the quality of care and pathway planning for children and young people. This is linked to implementation of our Signs of Stability operating model and SMART care planning. This will also reinforce the importance of updating good quality needs assessments and how these inform concurrent care and pathway plans.
14. Auditing activity will be taking place throughout the summer to measure the quality of our care and pathway planning activity.

### **The Range and Choice of Placements**

15. There is evidence of increased stability for children in the same placement for the last two years with May data showing 63.2%. Although still lower than the national average of 69%, exploratory work to understand the data shows a small group of older young people with significant challenges, are having an adverse effect through multiple placement breakdowns.
16. Support to young people and placements through social work visits is important and statutory visits have been maintained through a mixed economy of "on site" and "virtual visits" via social media platforms during the period of Lockdown.
17. There may be future impact from Covid-19 where placements have ended because young people have not kept to Lockdown guidance, or where older carers have needed to "shield".
18. The availability of placements for young people is a challenge for us and the high cost market creates a pressure for the service.

### **Next Steps**

19. There is awareness of the need to move to proactive planning around placements for those young people who have complex risk profiles. Providers and carers who can respond to these needs are an area that the Access to Resources Team (ART) is actively exploring.
20. The development of the Complex Safeguarding Service will increase the support offered and increase expertise and confidence in working with these additionally vulnerable young people.

### **Response to Covid 19**

21. During the period of Covid-19 lockdown statutory visits to children in care have been maintained with approximately 93% of visits held within timescales in April and May. This has been achieved by continuing to visit placements whilst conforming to government guidance around PPE and social distancing. Other visits have been conducted virtually using social media such as WhatsApp and Facetime, which has enabled social workers to speak with young people, offer reassurance and undertake the necessary checks. Feedback suggests that some of the creative ways that social workers have undertaken

"visits" has led to a greater responsiveness from some young people who have been less engaged in "traditional" home visits.

22. Particular attention was given to older young people living in semi-independent settings where support may have been less available to check on wellbeing and access to other sources of support.
23. Following an initial dip to 70% in March as initial responses to Covid-19 were put in place, CIC Reviews have continued to happen with 94% and 99% taking place on time in April and May. Again, utilising social media/skype platforms IRO's ensure that children's progress and the standard of practice continues to be monitored and progressed. Data for May evidences that 82% of children in care took an active part in their last Review.
24. The Department has emphasised the importance of children in care continuing to attend schools under the "vulnerable children" clause and most children in reception have continued to attend with a gradual but improving picture for those 8 and above to June 2020.

### **Next Steps**

25. Current responses will continue with a gradual return to "business as usual" in relation to physical visits to children and young people in placement. With the ability to meet both indoors and outdoors the options available to social workers and IRO's are increased. Continued mindfulness to the characteristics of each placement will govern the approach, but it is envisaged that through the summer months greater emphasis will be placed on providing as normal a service as possible.

### **Health of Children in Care**

26. Review Health Assessments have improved from the beginning of Q4's 74% to 83% in May, although this indicator has also been affected by the Covid-19 situation as performance in March had risen to 89%. The timeliness of Initial Health Assessments continues to require attention although the past two months have seen overall improvement from a low base, but again there is a likely impact of Covid-19 as the 69% achieved figure for April fell to 50% in May. At the year-end/Q4 the overall figure for children receiving a Health Assessment who needed one was 98% indicating that the tension sits around timeliness.
27. There remains an issue in ensuring that Initial and Review Health Assessments take place within statutory timeframes.

### **Next Steps**

28. Management action at a local level to ensure prompt referral and parental consent is gained at point of accommodation is ongoing. Capacity issues on a Pan-Dorset level are being followed up at Leadership level.

### **Exploitation and Missing Episodes**

29. A feature for BCP are those late entrant young people coming into care at 15/16/17, often as a result of breakdown in family relationships. Some young people have several exploitation indicators that present additional risks and increase vulnerability. As noted above this can have an impact on both placement availability and placement stability. The newly configured Complex Safeguarding Service will work with those categorized as high-risk and complement the support to other children in care whose risk is currently at

a lower level but where specialised input is advisable. New safeguarding pathways will create a framework for response and intelligence gathering that quantifies risk and identifies local hotspots for disruption activity.

30. Missing from care episodes have seen fluctuations since the beginning of the year, with 20 children reported as missing in April and 29 in May accounting for 39 and 58 episodes respectively. These vary from being late returning to placement through to longer term episodes where criminal exploitation may be a factor. There is also the continuing factor of UASC young people who go missing shortly after arrival, with three young people within this category currently. Strategy Meetings take place appropriately for those young people where risk is increased as missing periods lengthen and proactive action in partnership with police is a feature. For UASC young people, a positive characteristic is the continued monitoring and review that takes place to try and establish any new leads in finding them.
31. Of the 87% of missing episodes that required a Return Home Interview in May – 85% were completed. Failure to undertake a RHI is often related to the young person's perception that they were not missing or a simple refusal to engage in the process.

### **Next Steps**

32. The wider dimensions to criminal exploitation and responsiveness are supported by the Criminal Exploitation Improvement Plan.
33. Targeted training around Complex & Contextual Safeguarding for staff is being rolled out currently.
34. RHI's have seen a consistent improvement month on month but work around their timeliness is ongoing. The quality of RHI's is seen as satisfactory but the service would like to see a greater emphasis on sharing intelligence gained to pinpoint common areas of vulnerability.

### **Education Training and Employment**

35. There is a core group of young people who are missing out on education with 45 children in care not receiving full time education, of which 22 are not on a school roll. These issues relate to several areas for action – permanent exclusion from school pre-care entry, school refusal and difficulties in some out of area placements in gaining admission to local schools. The Virtual School is actively addressing the structural issues with admission in other areas.
36. There are growing concerns for some young people in the 16+ cohort who as a result of Covid-19 have not been able to attend college and university. Others have been in employment but have not benefitted from Furlough arrangements but have been made unemployed.
37. A key area for identifying and supporting young people's aspirations for Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment is their Pathway Plan. The availability of dedicated support from Ofsted HMI's provided by the Covid-19 situation has been utilised to support quality assurance of Pathway Plans and work with the service to assist with collective understanding of 'what a good pathway plan looks like'.
38. The proposed Care Leavers Pledge is being presented to this CPB. As part of this wider refresh of the Offer to Care Leavers, The Care Leavers Policy and Procedures have been updated to provide a clear statement.

## **Next Steps**

39. The Head of the Virtual School is drawing up a “Hard to Place” policy which will set out the expectations and processes around the responsibilities for all parties in ensuring that children in care receive appropriate educational provision.
40. IRO’s will continue to raise alerts related to the lack of school provision.
41. The Virtual School is working with the Learning Partnership Task Group to get children in care who are not on a school roll back into education.

## **Summary of financial implications**

1. There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

## **Summary of legal implications**

1. There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

## **Summary of human resources implications**

1. There are no human resources implications as a result of this report.

## **Summary of sustainability impact**

1. There is no sustainability impact as a result of this report.

## **Summary of public health implications**

1. There are no public health implications as a result of this report.

## **Summary of equality implications**

1. There are no specific equalities act implications.

## **Summary of risk assessment**

1. There are no risks linked to this report.

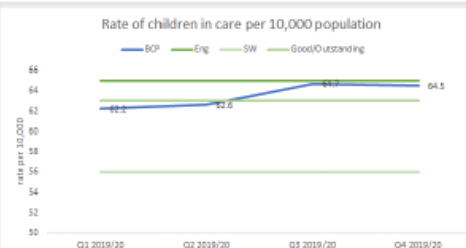
## **Background papers**

## **Appendices**

1. Appendix 1

## Current Children in Care

## 486 children in care



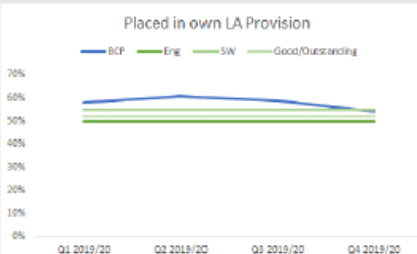
33 unaccompanied asylum seeking children  
(7% of those in care, 6% nationally)

- ✓ 90% of visits on time
  - ✓ 95% of reviews on time
- (children participated in 85%)

38 children in private fostering arrangements

3 UASC children in care currently missing

37 children in care at significant or moderate risk of exploitation



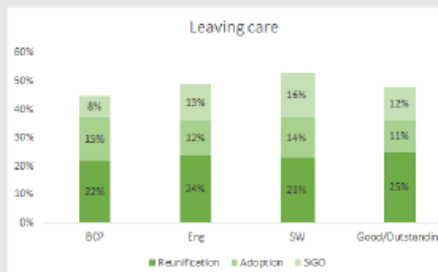
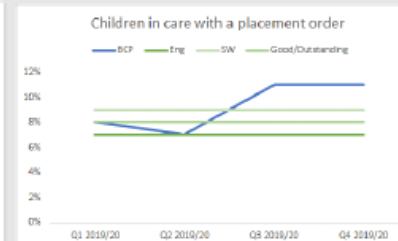
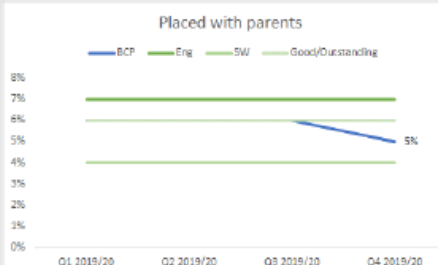
9% of children have had 3 or more placement moves in the last year  
(10% nationally)

56% of children have long term placement stability  
(69% nationally)

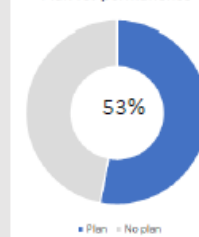
No children in care placed in B&B in the year

26% increase in family & friends' carers in the last 12 months

## Planning &amp; Achieving Permanence

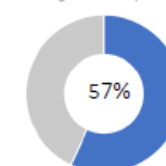


## Plan for permanence

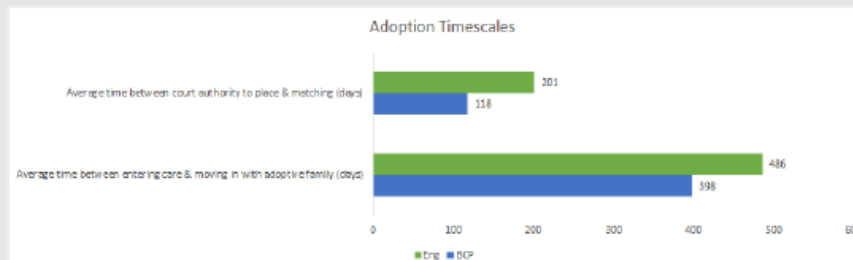


14% of children in care live with family & friends

Waiting less than 14 months from entering care to moving in with adoptive family

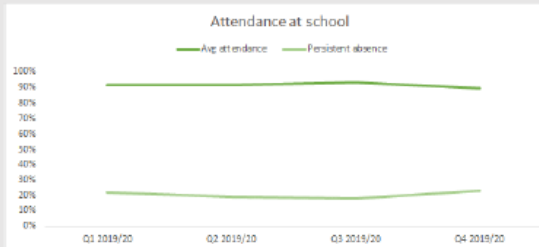


33 awaiting adoption (7% of CIC)





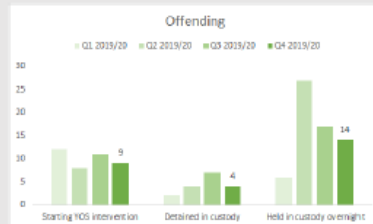
## Education of Children in Care



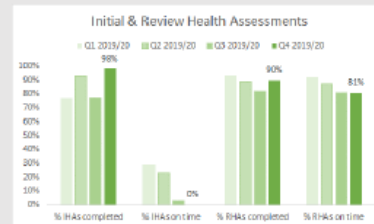
42 CIC missing out on education (14%)

27 CIC with fixed term exclusions, 1 permanently excluded

## Children in Care Offending



## Health of Children in Care



4 children in care in psychiatric hospitals in March 2020

## Workforce

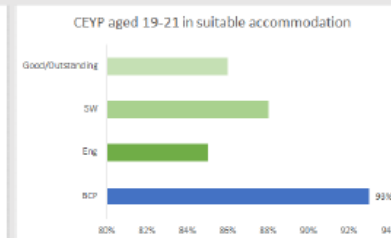
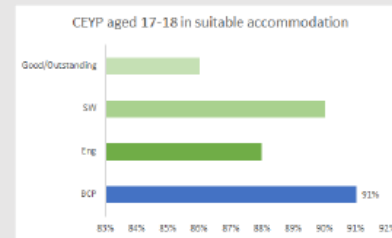
Social work positions covered by agency staff



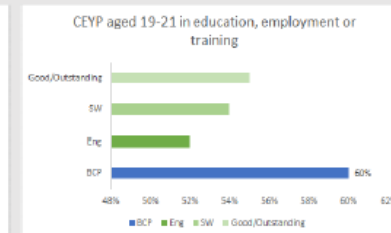
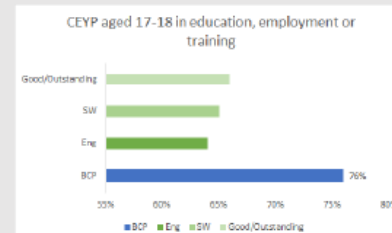
18  
average number of  
cases per social  
worker

2  
average number of  
social workers for  
each child in care

## Care Experienced Young People



3 care experienced young people living in B&B



17

care experienced  
young people in  
Higher Education

54

care experienced  
young people in  
Further Education

