

THE BCP CHILDREN’S SERVICES ACTION PLAN

Children’s services in BCP faces great challenges. It must improve quickly. A ‘focused visit’ by Ofsted in October 2020 sets out the concerns in detail, which BCP accepts. **See Appendix A – Ofsted Letter.**

We have identified 7 obsessions that will remain everyday obsessions until they form our culture. Each obsession will be subject to measurement – in key performance obsessions (KPO’s). Criteria will be set for a robust system for the 2021/22 business year.

However, there will be no delay in our work to normalise these obsessions in our everyday practice. The way we will do this is set out in the Action Plan below.

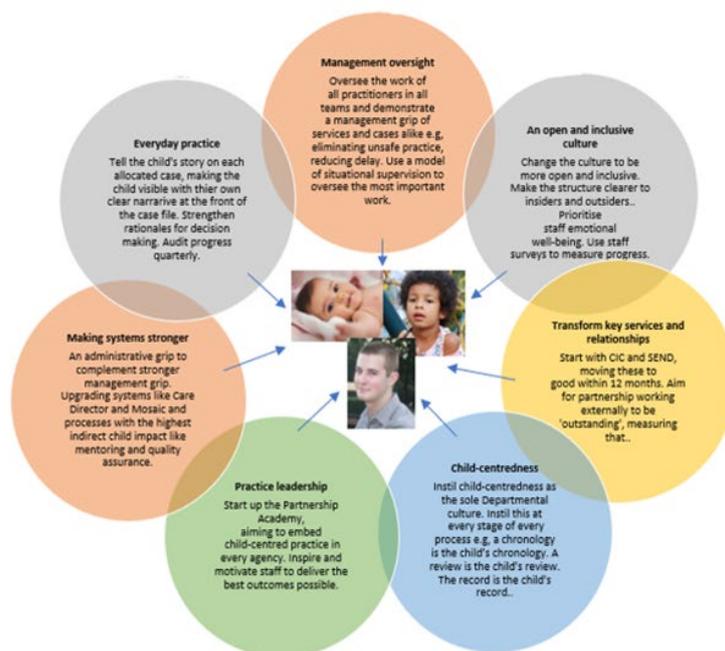
This is a short-term action plan, finishing in June 2021. We have done it this way as we need to show rapid improvement in areas that matter for the benefit of local children and families. The plan will have a rigorous review after 3 months, in March 2021.

At the same time, we will be developing a 3 year plan for all children in BCP, covering 2021-2024. This will also contain the medium-term action plan to deliver further improvements in children’s services.

HERE ARE OUR OBSESSIONS

7 Obsessions

Obsessions/emergency priorities for the next 9-12 months, to improve children’s social care services



AND HERE IS OUR 15-POINT ACTION PLAN

1. Strengthening child-centred practice

Inspectors found we were not making a big enough positive difference to the lives of children and young people. They found we paid too much attention to their parents and too little to them. Children were too frequently processed as cases, rather than their needs being met as a priority. Their voices were not heard sufficiently nor did their stories ‘leap off the page’ in case notes and reports.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Children feel more supported	Children feel more supported with improvements made to their daily lived experience	To be child-led and child-inclusive as a service, appropriate to each child
BCP becomes a better ‘corporate parent’	CIC * and CYEP * have their needs better met (their feedback says so + file reviews and audits	For each child in care to be looked after as well as they would be in the families of senior councillors and officers
The young people being tracked over the next few months report a higher positive impact on their lives by BCP	Reports to the Improvement Board show that BCP has added value by measures like providing a (more) secure base and sustainable benefits	80% satisfaction level with BCP. It is not possible to get close to 100% given the roles social workers have to play in the lives of some young people, where they have to take steps to protect them from harm or exploitation.

2. Moving to a single case management system

This action migrates the last cases on Care Director to Mosaic, to establish Mosaic as the single case management system for children’s social care in BCP. Further technical upgrades will be made to support front-line practitioners and managers practice ‘active case management’. This will help children and young people by making administration in the background easier.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Data migration (Care Together)	Data migrated	Continuously increasing functionality by a funded programme of technical upgrades and better take up by users of that functionality
Upgrade Mosaic to version 20.1.2	Other systems like Synergy, CCIS and Core+YOT connected	Simplification of workflows and service-specific improvements
Clearer integration of Mosaic with Signs of Safety	Children’s User Group commissions viable upgrades based upon analysis of service improvement potential	Continuously improving functionality which supports the integration of Signs of safety into the practice framework

3. Achieving permanence for children in care

All children in care need a secure base. Permanence is different for a baby and a teenager, but each needs the right permanency option for them. Permanence plans must be in place for all children in care and they must be achieved as soon as possible. This is early permanence although for the child concerned, it may already be 'late' if they have suffered trauma, abuse or neglect for a while. A culture of urgency is needed to achieve the right settled, secure and table placement for every child in care.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
That all children in care (CIC) have a good plan for permanence which is being driven forward	Quarterly audits establish no avoidable delay for any child with a permanence plan	A greater range of placements (placement sufficiency) and a quicker legal process when needed e.g., Special Guardianship Orders and Adoption Orders
Greater security and long-term stability for children in care	Independently chaired reviews and feedback show an increasing percentage of CIC feel they have a secure base	More active involvement by children in care in their care journeys and the options available to them
Stronger scrutiny by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's)	Quarterly audits of IRO input and added value to care plans and permanence plans	IRO's add value to all plans, using dispute resolution techniques when needed and escalate concerns within an escalation framework
Parallel planning including contingency planning	That all permanence plans have a coherent and timely Plan B if Plan A cannot be achieved	Well-resourced and viable Plans A and B for all CIC
Stronger supervision and management oversight	The impact of supervision and management oversight is clear in case notes, assessments and plans	The highest possible impact of supervision and management oversight on the quality of front-line work

4. Referral handling and assessment

BCP needs a clearer workflow between the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), the Assessment Service and Early Help. Together, these services should comprise an 'integrated front door'. The Action Plan will ensure that cases are well triaged and assessed and passed to the right service with the right information via a warm handover i.e., continuity of service. Assessments need to be of a consistently higher quality.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Clear workflows between MASH, Assessment and Early Help which are well understood internally and externally	All social care cases wrongly held in Early Help are transferred to the right team. Early Help is engaged at the earliest possible time without	No wrong door model introduced with the Early Help Locality Hubs engaging with children, young people and families at the earliest possible stage

	an unduly complicated workflow.	
A culture of help to become the dominant culture	A presumption of support in place, with need and risk well balanced and with both assessed and responded to well	Concurrent help and risk management introduced into the practice framework
Children's Services (CS) to routinely input into EHC assessments and plans	Audits of EHCP's show a much higher level of CS input into the care needs of children and young people who meet the threshold for an EHCP	Ever-improving quality of EHCP's and the implementation of those plans (audits show an increasing percentage)
Early Help re-configured with a smaller number of high impact programmes which are affordable within the resource level	Early Help diagnostic implemented	Each Approved programme has its own evidence base and methodology with staff trained as specialists
A sea change in the quality of assessments, with better use of evidence, more analysis and more understanding of the lived experience of children, young people and their families	Assessment Service transformed. Audits show rapidly improving quality of baseline assessments	Assessments provided through experienced stable teams of permanent staff only occasionally supplemented by agency staff (rather than the other way round)

5. Decision-making and plans

All decisions taken about children and young people have an evidence base and rationale recorded on the file. Assessments and plans are also evidence-informed so that there is a clear flow from the assessment through the decisions into the plan or plans.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Decisions taken about children and young people are evidence-informed with a written rationale	Quarterly audits show an ever-increasing number of decisions are evidence-informed, with a written rationale on file	Single-agency and multi-agency decision-making is outstanding and visible at every stage of a child's journey.
Plans for all children and young people demonstrably promote improvements in well-being and decreases in the risks they face	Quarterly audits	Co-produced plans (with the child or young person and their safe family members and significant others), with the role of everyone concerned made clear

6. Oversight of Public Law Outline (PLO) cases

These are applications to a family court for additional protection in the form of a court order, often requesting a child is removed from their family and placed elsewhere e.g., with extended family or outside of the family altogether. These are some of BCP's most vulnerable children and young people, so these applications and the court processes must not be avoidably delayed by BCP.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
The thresholds for a family court application, including for secure accommodation, are sound and consistent	Active involvement from the Case Progression Officer in all cases at both the pre-proceedings stage and in the court process. Quarterly audits to assess the quality of the Social Work Evidence Template and the court care plan	High quality court applications with all options for diversion considered before proceedings are issued. Good contingency plans accompanying each application
No avoidable delays in case progression through the court	Effective supervision and management oversight recorded on the file	Zero avoidable delay

7. Quality Assurance

Good quality assurance prevents some serious mistakes being made and improves everyday practice. Quality assurance systems need to be strengthened so that BCP can show it is learning from experience and putting those lessons into practice without delay.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Improvements in practice between December 2020 and March 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) A baseline audit of 80 cases in December 2020, re-audited in March 2021 2) Casework gradings improve 	To be auditing a sample of work and a sample of workers proportionately as part of everyday practice.
Developing a revised quality assurance framework and an annual scrutiny programme for 2021/22	Revised framework in place, auditors trained, staff aware and a structured scrutiny programme being ready to go by 1 April 2021	For quality assurance activity to be demonstrating a direct link with practice improvement and higher standards

8. Develop a more open and inclusive culture

Staff and partner agencies need to be included more in how BCP develops and operates. The corporate centre and councillors are now more engaged. This is a positive start. A more 'open and inclusive' culture will make staff feel more respected, trusted and listened to – the same culture that we are aiming for with the children and families we work with. 'Culture' is as important as 'strategy' when improvements are needed, so this is a crucial part of the Action Plan.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
A continuous improvement in staff morale and satisfaction, including in measures to support their well-being	Quarterly staff surveys show morale is improving, workloads are felt to be more manageable and staff feel the risks they hold are shared with managers and the organisation corporately	Happy, high-performing staff in an organisation in which the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
Roles and teams in the structure are clear to staff and partner agencies	A greater awareness and application of 'the way we work around here' inside and outside of BCP	The organisation ticks over quietly in the background, supporting and inspiring staff to go about their work.
BCP becoming an 'employer of choice'	1) More permanent staff, fewer agency staff and interims 2) Lower flight risk by improving workforce security and stability	BCP is established as an 'employer of choice' with staff proud to work for BCP and proud to be high-performing

9. Stronger leadership and management

BCP has experienced too many changes of leadership and direction in the recent past. A period of stability and growth is now essential. Senior managers must motivate and inspire their workforce more. Above all, they must be able to articulate a vision of how BCP should work and be clear about the roadmap to get there.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Culture change to one of practice leadership and education	The narrative in team meetings, practice events and awaydays is more about children and what they need than being about the organisation and its troubles	For BCP to be a practice-led culture in a position to contribute to sector-led improvement rather than to be just on the receiving end of help and support.
The operating model is clear	Rapid Improvement Toolkit developed and in widespread use, making everything clear	The operating model is regularly updated with input from those using BCP services as well as staff and partner agencies

10. SEND

SEND services need considerable improvement to be delivered in a timelier way, with a greater priority being attached to them by all agencies and with more of a culture of co-production with families who too often feel unsupported.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Move the percentage of EHC assessments completed within the statutory timescale to at least the national average	Consistent monthly percentage increases in the completion rate + regular audits show increasing quality in EHC plans	For the statutory SEND service to operate without backlogs. A more varied number and type of service packages being commissioned.
More input from Children's Services into EHCP's	(cross-referenced to 4 above)	Care, health and education give equal priority to SEND
The child's story and the family's narrative are the start of an EHC plan	Quarterly audits show this is being done on all new plans (30-40 each month)	Assessments and plans are a co-production between professionals and families
The SEND diagnostic and SEND Learning and Improvement Plan are being delivered at pace	All actions implemented on time (to be monitored by the SEND Improvement Board)	High levels of satisfaction in the community about statutory and non-statutory SEND services

11. Quality of case recording

Case notes and reports for all purposes need to be more evidence-based and analytical.

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
More analytical writing in case notes and reports	Best practice examples identified, taught systematically and made available to all staff for reference purposes. Quarterly audits confirm improvement	For all written work to show good use of language, punctuation and sentence construction and for all recording and reports to be brief, analytical and evidence-based

12. Performance management, including the quality of supervision

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Regular supervision for all staff	Audit of supervision records for frequency and quality. Self-reporting of supervisees confirms added value	Supervision adds value to the job and person being supervised and it is clear from file records that children and young people benefit

		indirectly from the type of supervision being carried out
Situational supervision being available in a crisis	Self-reporting of practitioners that they can access high quality advice and support in a crisis or emergency	That a 'team around the practitioner' and 'team around the manager' model ensures high levels of support and constructive challenge for all staff
An industry-standard performance management system is developed	System in place with all levels and aspects of performance being managed	Performance management makes a significant contribution to quality of practice and use of resources

13. Impact of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's)

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Higher impact and clear added value to care and permanence plans	Audits of a sample of children and young people's plans show added value	The IRO service is a valued and vital check and balance within the corporate parenting function
Advocacy role for Children in Care when appropriate	IRO's required to self-report every 6 months	All CIC who need an advocate can count on their IRO to be that advocate
Escalation of concerns when needed	Escalation policy in place. Senior managers responsible for ensuring it is being used.	Urgent cases are automatically escalated when dispute resolution fails

14. School-related improvements

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Reduced exclusions	A downward trend in permanent and fixed-term exclusions, supported by the 'team around the school' to ensure multi-agency support is made available to prevent an exclusion	Zero permanent exclusions
Reduced level of EHE causing concern	A grip of the data and care and support packages made available to children in EHE causing concern	No EHE arrangements give a safeguarding or welfare concern
Steps to reduce inequalities	A programme to reduce inequalities receives prominence in the BCP Children and Young People's Plan for 2021/24	A dashboard of inequalities is monitored at every Partnership Board and shows a continuously reducing gap

Virtual School (VS) champions the educational and schools needs of all children in care	More visibility by the VS Head Teacher who has set up a managed network of schools and foster carers to promote and champion the needs of children in care	The Virtual School uses authority with schools and colleges to ensure all children in care receive a bespoke service which enhances their life chances.
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15. Corporate contributions to the transformation of children's services

Outcomes sought	Evidence base for improvement	Future ambition
Faster and better recruitment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Recruitment and retention payment in place 2) A steady growth in the number of permanent staff and reduced use of agency staff 	Stable high-performing teams made up of permanent staff across Children's Services
Accommodation options e.g. a care leaver's hub + office accommodation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Options for a care leavers hub explored with care leavers and a project underway to deliver this 2) Child-friendly office spaces (to enable direct work with children and young people) 	Fit for purpose accommodation for staff and children
Apprenticeships for children in care	Increasing number of apprenticeships in place	An apprenticeship offer for every care leaver who wants to take it up

Appendix A – Ofsted letter, 27 November 2020



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