

Report of the Director of Children's Services to the meeting of The Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 8th March 2021

Subject:

AA

Adoption and Permanence Update

Summary statement:

This report provides the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel with an overview of the subject of adoption and permanence for children in care in Bradford.

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Portfolio:

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides members of the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on:

- Bradford's adoption data and performance
- Our action plan in respect of adoption
- The wider issue of "permanence" for our children in care.

2. BACKGROUND

Adoption

- 2.1 Since 1st April 2020 a total of twenty-one of our children in care have achieved permanence and a "forever family" via adoption. This is a really positive outcome for these children.
- 2.2 At the time of writing there are 80 children in care who are also subject to a Placement Order. This is just 6% of our total children in care population.
- 2.3 Of these children the oldest is seven and the youngest is not yet one year old.
- 2.3 Of these children 37 have already been placed with an adoptive family but are not yet adopted.
- 2.4 There are 46 children who have not yet been matched with a family and for whom "family finding" is still taking place.
- 2.3 Of these the majority have been waiting to be matched for less than six months however some children have been waiting longer for a family to be found for them and this is usually because of factors that mean that they may have more complex needs.
- 2.4 Family finding for children who are subject to Placement Orders is undertaken regionally by One Adoption West Yorkshire which brings the benefit of a wider pool of potential families for our children.
- 2.5 One Adoption uses a variety of means to identify families for our children both locally and nationally. When a family expresses an interest in adopting one of our children discussions will take place with One Adoption and the child's social worker and then hopefully if these discussions are positive, the process of assessing the suitability of the match between the child and the family can begin.
- 2.6 The match will then be presented to the Adoption Panel and if the panel recommends that the match is appropriate the Agency Decision Maker will consider the match and make a final decision.
- 2.7 When the Agency Decision Maker has agreed the match the introductions of child to family can begin and plans can be made for the child to move to their new family.

- 2.8 At the moment in Bradford there are 37 children who have been placed with adopters but who have not yet had an Adoption Order made. These children remain children in care.
- 2.9 The majority of these children have been placed for adoption for less than six months although there are a small number of children who have waited for longer than this due to issues of complexity.
- 2.10 There are two key national performance indicators relating to adoption:
- The length of time that a child was in care before being placed for adoption
 - The length of time between the making of a Placement Order and the child being matched to a family.
- 2.11 Both of these indicators are important for our children because they relate to the length of time that they experience uncertainty about their future. Therefore, it is in their best interests for decisions about their future to be made as quickly as possible to provide them with a sense of permanence.
- 2.12 The length of time that children wait before being placed for adoption or adopted has increased overall in the past year and the pandemic and “lock down” has clearly had an impact. It has made it more difficult for assessments to be undertaken and for introductions to start. The courts have experienced challenges due to the need to prioritise urgent cases involving children who require protection. However, the pandemic does not seem to have adversely affected the number of people who choose to become adopters.
- 2.13 The most recent data puts Bradford’s performance in the middle range of the region. However, we do aspire to be a top performer and to provide permanence to our children quickly when the decision has been made that this is the best outcome for them.
- 2.13 In order to achieve this aim we need to ensure that any unnecessary delays are minimised and this has resulted in the development of an action plan to support our staff. Adoption is a complex and demanding area of work with many processes that require completion in order to arrive at a good outcome for a child as well as many life-changing decisions that need to be made. Children who should be adopted represent only a small part of our children in care cohort and as a result social workers and their managers often do not build up a level of experience in this area of work. Therefore, we need to ensure that systems are in place to support them.
- 2.14 Our adoption action plan includes numerous actions designed to support our workforce to gain confidence in undertaking adoption work and to provide them with the support they need. This includes the provision of new, simplified guidance on adoption processes and the provision of information bulletins and direct briefings to staff by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 2.15 As of January 2021 we have now moved to an internal Agency Decision Maker (ADM) from an external consultant. This role is now taken up by the Assistant

Director – Safeguarding, Commissioning and Provider Services and as well as resulting in a cost saving, provides an opportunity for closer links between the ADM and the service. The ADM now holds regular practice briefings for staff on aspects of adoption, with support from OAWY.

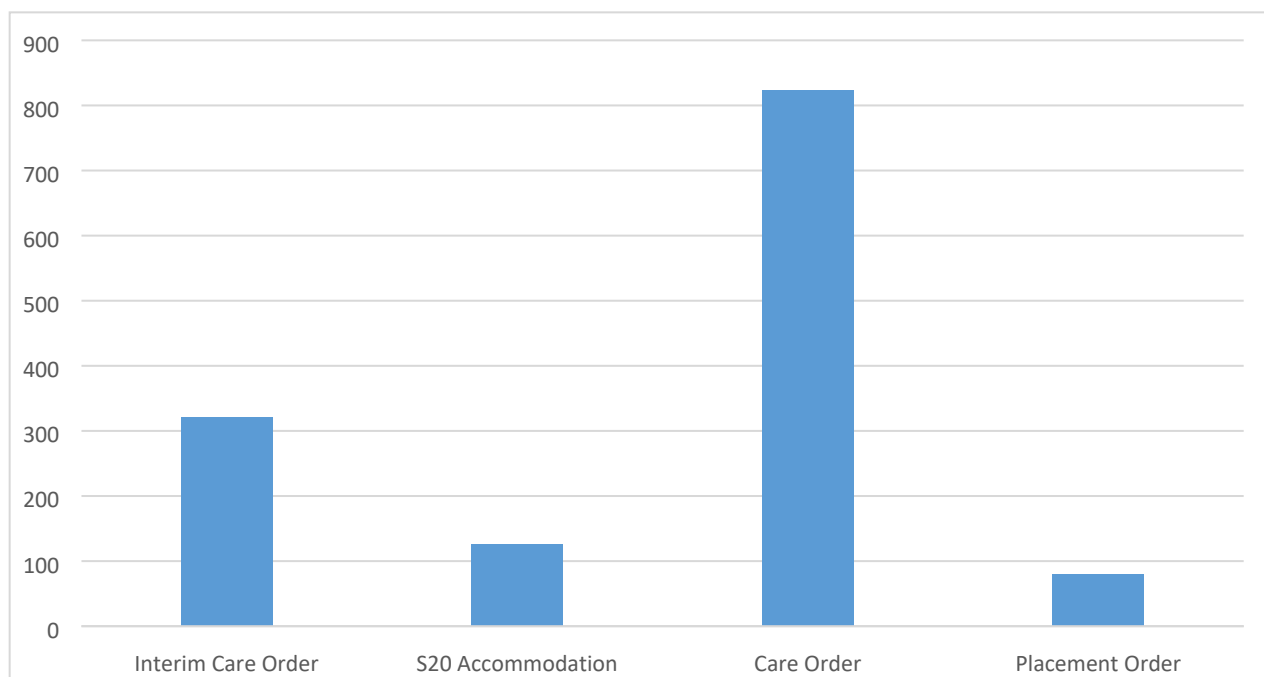
Permanence

- 2.16 As indicated above only a small proportion of children in care will achieve permanence via adoption.
- 2.17 Permanence in effect means that a child in care has certainty about where they will be living for the remainder of their childhood.
- 2.18 Other options for permanence include the potential for children to be cared for in the long term by family members who become Special Guardians. The advantage for these children is that they will be able to safely exit the care system and will no longer experience the visits and meetings that all children in care experience.
- 2.18 Other children may need to remain in the care system but can still achieve permanence through having a “long term” Care Plan or being “matched” to long term foster carers who have been able to commit to caring for the child until 18.
- 2.19 Permanence can therefore be achieved for our children in a variety of different ways depending on their circumstances.
- 2.20 Achieving permanence for our children in care remains an area for development in Bradford that was identified in our 2018 Ofsted inspection.
- 2.21 To support this a number of new mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that we remain focussed on plans to achieve permanence including:
- Reviewing the care plans of children who are placed at home with a parent in order to establish whether they still need the support and protection of the care system or whether their Care Order can now be safely discharged. A number of children have now had their Care Orders discharged and we are in the process of making applications for a number of other children.
 - Where it is safe to do so, supporting family members who look after a child on a long term basis to seek Special Guardianship meaning that they will no longer be part of the care system.
 - Implementing new tracking mechanisms in each locality to help maintain a tight grip on permanence plans
 - The introduction of Care Planning Meetings which take place between statutory LAC Reviews aimed at ensuring that plans are progressed.
 - Regular review of cohorts of children who are in care but have not yet achieved permanence including children who are accommodated under S20 and those placed with family members
- 2.22 Of our current children in care cohort 266 children live on a permanent basis with members of their family who have been approved as foster carers. These children have thus achieved permanence however some of these children no longer need be in the care system and could progress to an SGO where they would no longer

need social workers in their lives.

2.23 We have 328 children who are subject to Care Orders living with foster carers who are not family members. These children have a variety of care plans including for some children planned return to family within a period of time. Others will remain in foster care for the remainder of their childhood and have been “matched” with their carers giving them a greater sense of permanence and belonging. This matching takes place via the Foster Care Panel who will consider matching reports concerning the child, carer and placement. If the match is agreed, the child will be deemed to be placed on a long term basis with these specific carers. Matching will often be followed by some form of celebration for the child and their family.

2.24 The legal status of our children in care is show below:



2.25 Children subject to an **Interim Care Order** remain the subject of legal proceedings and thus cannot yet achieve permanence because we do not yet know what their future care arrangements will be.

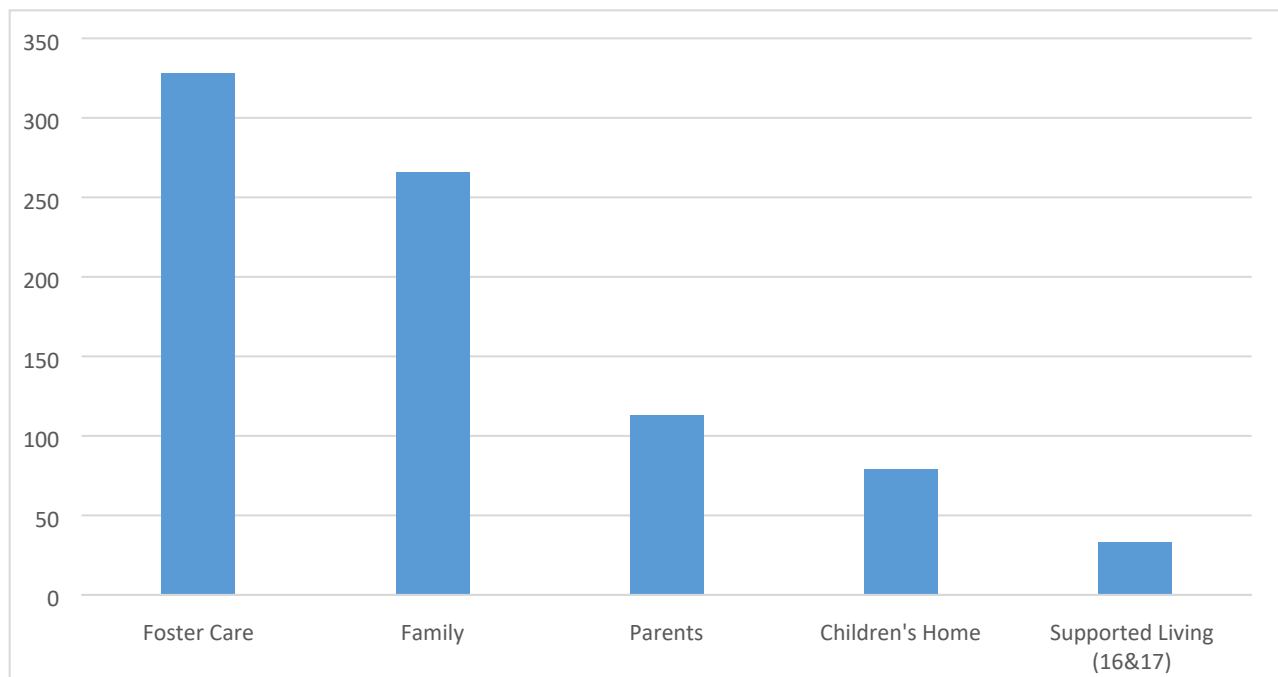
2.26 Children who are provided with S20 Accommodation do not yet have permanence. The LA does not hold parental responsibility for them. For younger children S20 accommodation should only ever be a short term arrangement while longer term plans are being made. In Bradford the number of children subject to S20 has been reduced and is now less than 10% of our total population. The majority of children subject to S20 are aged 16 and 17 and therefore do not require us to seek parental responsibility for them. The remainder are now newer arrangements for younger children where assessments are being conducted in order to determine whether legal applications should be made. A small number are very young children who have been relinquished for adoption by their birth parents.

2.27 Children who are subject to a final Care Order are those for whom the LA will share parental responsibility with until they are eighteen. However, they will not all stay in

care until they are 18. Some will achieve permanence with their carers via an SGO and some will potentially return to their parents.

2.28 There are 80 children subject to a Placement Order and it is expected that all of these children will achieve permanence via adoption. For a small number of children for whom OAWY have been unable to find an adoptive family, the ADM may make the decision to rescind their adoption plan and for us to return the case to court in order to apply for the Placement Order to be discharged.

2.29 The different types of placements for children who are subject to a final Care Order are shown below. Our challenge is to ensure that all of these children have as much security and a sense of permanence as possible regardless of the type of placement in which they live:



3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

➤ None

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

➤ None

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

None

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- None

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- NA

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

- NA

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- NA.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

- NA

7.5 TRADE UNION

- NA

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

- No specific Ward implications

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

- NA

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

See above

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

NA

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

- None

9. OPTIONS

- 9.1 The report is for information only.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The report is for information only.

11. **APPENDICES**

None

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Background documents are documents relating to the subject matter of the report which disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based, and have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report. Published works are not included.
- All documents referred to in the report must be listed, including exempt documents.
- All documents used in the compilation of the report but not specifically referred to, must be listed.