

Budget Scrutiny Committee 22/10/13

Securing Permanence Group

1. Background

The group is tasked with improving the quality of social work practice and processes associated with ensuring that children in care are placed with permanent carers as soon as possible. This is a completely new initiative which continues to develop in terms of the specific information gathering and tracking processes.

The group have continued to meet on an almost monthly basis. The standing group consists of the Social Care SDMs across Safeguarding with attendance of the Business Manager for Data Support, with legal advice being sought as appropriate.

2. What we have learnt

There has, to date, been a focus upon children subject of a Placement Order for 9 months or longer as per the Terms of Reference. There has been consideration of the overall plan for the child, ensuring that there are clear timescales in place and that there is evidence of progress through actions. The following has become evident:

- Whilst part of the cohort, and continuing to be subject of Placement Orders, it was apparent that a number of the children were placed within their Adoptive Placement and were awaiting confirmation of a Hearing Date for the Adoption Order to be made. In other cases a hearing date had been confirmed and was imminent.
- There was evidence of effective planning in terms of determining that adoption was no longer the appropriate plan for the child and in many cases the care plan change to securing permanence via long term fostering had been ratified at a Child in Care Review. The application to revoke the Placement Order in these cases is more variable in terms of timeliness of approach.
- Children's cases continue to be tracked and scheduled to be reviewed on a regular basis and targets set to ensure clarity of arrangements and to avoid drift regarding planning etc

The group have also reviewed the small group of children subject of Care Orders who are placed at home with their parents. To date the following is evident:

- From the information shared parents are clear as to requirements set out in the Local Authority arrangements and what is required in terms of achieving a good enough level of care would look like to discontinue the order.
- The Local Authority is seeking to revoke Care Orders where appropriate. Whilst being the most appropriate plan for the child there will be associated savings in terms of Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer time and capacity.

3. Further Activity underway/planned

In terms of progressing the targets for 2013 the following progress has being made:

- The group are currently in the process of agreeing timescales and identifying a pathway to support the process of revocation of Placement Orders where the child's care plan has changed from adoption (September 2013).
- The pathway for securing external adoptive placements for harder to place children has been reviewed and arrangements are in place for earlier approval for funding and closer joint progress monitoring by Telford and Joint Adoption Managers
- The group are currently reviewing the children subject of Care Orders who have been in care for 12 months or longer. A number of children (22) have been identified as being potentially suitable to be formally matched with their current long term carer and reduction targets are being set.
- The cohort of children placed at home, have been considered, it was apparent with the information presented there was a clear plan for each child, with applications being made to discontinue with the Care Order in 2 of the cases.
- There is ongoing work being undertaken in terms of meeting the target for children exiting care via Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) .and a number of children who might benefit have been identified and the policy is being reviewed with a view to encouraging take-up

4. Contribution to the Cost Improvement Plan

A number of the activities will contribute to the achievement of cost improvement plan and council savings targets.

- More and speedier adoption reduces fostering costs, even where it is necessary to pay £27k for an external placement for children who are more difficult to place. Annual cost avoided for one child placed for adoption is a minimum of £16k.
- More and speedier SGOs produces a small net saving, as the majority of costs transfer from the placement budget to the SGO allowances budget.
- A reduction in the number of CIC would enable a strategic review of capacity

Jo Britton
Service Delivery Manager Safeguarding Advisory Service
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