

Looked After Children

Improvement in Achieving Permanency Shetland Islands Council

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Shetland Islands Council worked to prioritise permanency and to reduce the length of time it takes to secure permanency for children.

Background

In 2013 Shetland Council engaged with the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS)'s Permanence and Care Team (PaCT) and identified key areas where there was delay in permanency planning for children. While there was some success in securing permanence for babies and very young children, there were concerns about very lengthy delays for some children in foster and residential care. The council was keen to secure permanency for children in better time.

Key Activities

Shetland examined its data related to permanency in children's services between the years of 2008 and 2013. It then undertook a process mapping exercise to identify any delays, both actual and potential, and revised their policy and procedure documents.

Permanency was included as one of the six key priorities in the council's Strategy for Looked After Children 2014 – 2019.

A conference, workshop, and group consultation sessions were held to inform key individuals and groups about the priority of permanency. These groups and individuals were well placed to help with the aim of achieving permanency and included representatives from: Children's Panel, Permanency panel, social work colleagues and multi-agency partners including housing and legal services.

Form E workshops were developed and mentors were identified who would be able to facilitate these.

CELCIS provided a template to use in supervision where permanence is required and the council developed a permanence tracking tool, as well as an accompanying quality assurance process.

Benefits and Impact

The number of children who have been secured through permanency or are in a permanency process has increased significantly over the past year; year 13/14 there were three children are in the process, compared to year 14/15 where currently 13 children are in the process.

The Form E workshops are considered a good way of involving key people and pulling together information about the child.

Conversations about permanency are now starting much sooner.

The new procedure has been adopted by the social work teams and gives guidance on process and timeframes.

Achieving permanence for their looked after children has become a priority, and this has consequently placed a significant amount of pressure on the council's legal colleagues.

Going forward, Shetland are is now looking to work on its Permanence Tracking spreadsheet. The assurance process will ensure that progress is reported. Through this, the council hopes to be able to identify where the delays have been and whether there are any themes emerging.

Learning

The external expertise CELCIS's PaCT helped maintain the momentum of the council's work, and provided a sounding board for staff individually and collectively as they began to progress permanency plans for children.

The council felt it needed to change mind sets and build confidence around decision making. The work with PaCT over the year helped to establish a common understanding, and the expertise and knowledge they brought was important in helping staff feel able and empowered.