

Department for children, adults and health

Improving Placement Stability

Policy and Guidance

South Gloucestershire Council

September 2020

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**Date: September 2020**

**Review date: September 2022**

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# Purpose

This document sets out South Gloucestershire’s Children’s Services policy and approach to ensuring that placement stability is at the forefront of every care arrangement.

It will also provide practice guidance in relation to placement stability in identifying, managing and monitoring placement stability and avoiding unplanned endings as far as possible.

# Background

Children and young people entering care are likely to have been abused or neglected. Their experiences are also likely to have included one or more of the following: domestic violence, substance misusing parent(s), poverty, homelessness, the loss of a parent, or inadequate parenting. Attachment experiences with carers may have been disturbed, and these experiences can underpin the subsequent limited or conflictual pattern of connections that many children and young people make with foster carers and in the case of those in residential care, care staff. By becoming looked after, children and young people will already have experienced loss and disruption in their lives and their experience in care must be geared towards stability and permanence from the outset.

Research has identified that children and young people who go on to experience instability and frequent unplanned moves once separated from their families and in our care, are likely to be those who already displayed behaviours indicative of having been traumatised and neglected prior to becoming looked after. Challenging and aggressive behaviour, (that reflects the life experiences, trauma and exploitation any of the children may have experienced), that carers feel they lack the skills and support to contain, is a key reason for children having to move from their foster home. However, living arrangements can also break down for other reasons unrelated to the child or young person, for example: rivalry difficulties between foster children and the family’s own children; contact with the birth family, and events within the foster family.

Children who do not have significant behaviour problems when they come into care are particularly vulnerable to ‘internalising behaviour’ if they have to leave their foster home, for example being withdrawn and isolated. Frequent and unplanned moves for children in care have a very negative impact on the ability of children to thrive in the long term. Stein (Resilience and Young People leaving Care 2005), and others have identified that young people who experience stable living arrangements with good quality care are more likely to succeed educationally, be in work, settle in and manage their own home after leaving care, feel better about themselves, and achieve satisfactory social integration in adulthood, than young people who have experienced further movement and disruption during their time in care. If a child has to live away from their home temporarily or permanently, research also shows that stable and nurturing homes directly influence the child’s ability to recover from the abusive and neglectful experiences which they have previously had. (Harden, 2004, in Price at al, 2008)

The South Gloucestershire Permanence Policy states that:

“Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. Permanence provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual well-being and promotes lifelong connections to family, siblings, other significant adults, family history and traditions, race and ethnic heritage, culture, religion and language….. Put simply, permanence means “for ever”. It is a stable position allowing children and young people the opportunity to put down roots and create a foundation for belonging for life.”

# Definition and Scope

A simple working definition of what we are trying to achieve for children and young people through this policy and practice guidance is as follows:

If children have to live away from home, temporarily or permanently, we will make sure that they can live and settle in homes where they are given high quality care, and that we will do all we can to make sure the care they receive isn’t interrupted by unplanned breakdowns or changes which are not in their interests

This definition assumes that permanency is central to care planning. Ideally, children who come into care would live in one home (foster care or residential) before returning to their birth family or becoming part of another family permanently. Children should move only when their permanence goals require it. **The goal is to reduce moves except those that are progressions toward permanence, and to eliminate unplanned moves.**

If a child has to live away from their home/birth family, this policy covers children and young people living in the following arrangements:

* Foster care
* Residential care
* Kinship care (Family and Friends)
* Independent Fostering Agency care
* Staying Put care
* Semi-Independent units
* Children living at home on care orders

This policy has been produced with reference to and should be read in conjunction with:

The South Gloucestershire Children Looked After Joint Strategic Needs Analysis

Corporate Parenting Strategy

South Gloucestershire Permanency Policy

The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 2: care planning, placement and case review

The South Gloucestershire Fostering Improvement and Development Plan

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

Best Practice Standards for Fostering

Practice Tips – Placement Stability and Stability Meetings

Placement Stability Meetings Practice Guidance and template

Unplanned Endings Practice Guidance

This policy covers the need for all children in care (irrespective of age), and Care Leavers who are moving towards independence, to have settled high quality homes which are not interrupted.

# How will we work to ensure children and young people who are in care live in settled family homes?

## 4.1 A good choice of homes for children and young people to go and live in

There is a renewed focus on ensuring there is a choice of foster families for children with, and enough homes to meet the needs of all looked after children and young people in South Gloucestershire, with a particular focus on adolescents. There is also a need to commission a flexible range of support for young people aged 16 to 25, that provides a pathway between care and independence. This includes the Staying Put arrangements, Supported Lodgings and Semi- Independent accommodation.

Particular attention will be given to finding foster families for the following categories of children and young people:

* Adolescents
* Children and young people with challenging behaviour
* Sibling groups
* Young People who require support to achieve independence

The fostering service Marketing and Recruitment Strategy sets out how we will increase the number and capacity of in-house fostering families. It is critically important to have a sufficient pool of foster carers to cater for the varied needs of children. In addition to increasing our pool of in-house carers we will:

* Use independent providers to complement our in-house provision when the needs of the child require this. Wherever possible these providers will be locally based so that young people have the opportunity to remain in their communities and maintain their networks.
* Use Residential homes when this is the best environment to meet young people’s needs. Where this is the case there should be a positive choice for this type of provision. However, the permanency plan for the young person must be clear about how we will support the young person to return to a family environment whenever possible and appropriate.
* Use school-based settings - a significant proportion of disabled children are cared for in school-based settings which are out of county and have been identified to meet their holistic needs, and for some children school based settings are the best option, especially when they can come home to family at the weekend or to carers.

## 4.2 Supervision for Carers

Supervision of both the child’s social worker and the supervising social worker need to take place at the required intervals and discussions about children in care must be recorded in line with the supervision policy. If supervision discussions or recording lack detail regarding the needs of children and young people and do not result in subsequent future planning and agreed decisions in supervision, there is good evidence that this can lead to instability and unplanned endings. Full compliance with the supervision policy is required.

A foster carers’ supervision recording template should be used to ensure all relevant areas are covered with the supervising social worker. Higher levels of support should be provided to new foster carers to test/assess their resilience as well as offering space for reflective supervision, and to those where there are signs that the child or the carers are struggling with the arrangements.

## 4.3 High Quality Recording

The vital importance of recording cannot and should not be underestimated throughout the child’s stay with a foster family, and there must be full compliance with the recording policy. The child’s social worker and the supervising social worker in particular must ensure they record visits and observations accurately and with a relevant level of detail and analysis. Any observations/issues of significance should be flagged to colleagues. Alerts on Mosaic recording must be raised with either the child’s social worker by the supervising social worker or the supervising social worker by the child’s social worker to ensure everyone is aware. Poor communication is a significant contributory factor to instability and unplanned endings.

Managers decisions must be recorded in a timely way in line with the recording policy to ensure that all relevant decisions are on file at the earliest opportunity. Again, Mosaic alerts where needed will ensure good communication across the service.

Minutes from meetings must be placed on both the child and foster carer record. Reviewing these is a shared responsibility between the fostering and child care service.

Foster carer recordings submitted to the supervising social worker must be read by the receiving social worker and forwarded to the child’s social worker. Any issues in the recording which may indicate issues which could lead to the child needing to leave the foster family in an unplanned way must be discussed in supervision with the foster carer. The child’s social worker must read the carer’s recordings and upload onto Mosaic, and follow up any issues the recordings highlight.

## 4.4 Good Support for carers

Ensuring that for both foster carers and young people there is **good support and effective early intervention** is vital to help prevent things going wrong.

A key to promoting stability, is effective support to carers who are caring for children and young people who have often experienced trauma and rejection, and adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and who can therefore need a high level of support themselves. High quality of care and attachments experienced by young people can be a significant resilience-promoting factor into adulthood.

The support provided to foster carers routinely is set out in the Supervision and Support of Foster Carers policy (TriX6.1.5) and in the Foster carers Handbook. This includes before and after a child goes to live with the carers.

## 4.5 Involving and Supporting Children and Young people

Children and young people should be enabled to participate fully in decision making. In South Gloucestershire we believe that for children and young people, no key decisions should be made without their participation – ‘Nothing about us without us’. The views of children are important at every stage – both before and after they are living with their foster family.

We will ensure that children’s wishes and feelings are heard and they are involved in a meaningful way in all their plans for help and protection through sufficient preparation. All children for example with receive a ‘Welcome to our Home’ booklet before they go to stay with a new family, to tell them more about the foster family. They will receive a pack of information once they become looked after, including the children’s guide.

The views of children will influence decisions such as where they live and who they may have contact with whilst they are living with their foster family. They will, as far as possible be encouraged to go to all the meetings about them depending upon their age and understanding.

## 4.6 Tracking and care planning

Strong tracking and care planning will be in place to support stability and achieve permanence.

The following objectives have been identified in relation to this aim:-

* Ensuring that all Children in care and Care Leavers have a plan for permanence as soon as possible with a clear and planned journey through their care irrespective of their age
* Ensuring effective assessment and planning processes throughout
* Listening to the views and wishes of children, young people and their families
* All decisions about who children live with to be supported by integrated high quality assessment and planning
* Rigorous scrutiny by management and Independent Reviewing Officers of care plans and permanence planning
* A risk assessment and action plan, to be completed every time a child moves to a new home which is reviewed and updated if there is an escalation of risk
* Where there are signs that a child may have to leave a foster home in an unplanned way a stability meeting should be convened as soon as signs are observed
* Tracking if stability meetings are happening and followed up by team managers
* Ensuring all professionals are aware they can flag the need for a stability meeting including education and health professionals

# 5. Stability Meetings

Stability meetings are held as soon as it is identified that a foster placement is at risk of disruption and there is the possibility of an unplanned move for a child or young person in care. It should be convened within **48 hours** of the request by the child care social worker, supervising social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer or foster carer (brief guidance and template attached appendix 1).

Signs of instability can appear in a range of ways. Anyone in the team around the child in care may be the first to notice the problem – the foster carer, child’s social worker, supervising social worker, the young person themselves. It is important that whichever professional identifies it first **takes action swiftly.** It may be the case that foster carers are not acknowledging a problem, and the child or young person may also seem to be oblivious to any issue. It may also be that carers have reached a point where they threaten to ask for the child to be moved and that this is a serious cry for help, and not that they really have reached the point that they want the child to leave*.* However, experience shows that it is vital any identified issues are dealt with before they become too serious. This is why regular visits to the child by their social worker are so important, why supervision visits from supervising social workers are essential and why communication between all parties is so vital. It is important if social workers are concerned that the child may have to move out in an unplanned way that meetings go ahead even if foster carers are not yet at the point of recognising the issues – the team manager makes the final decision.

The stability meeting aims to understand what can be done to prevent a child or young person moving and to ensure that all avenues of support and intervention have been explored before agreement is given to authorise a move for a child or young person.

# 6.Unplanned Ending Meetings

Unplanned Ending Meetings will be held when a child or young person has had to move out of a foster home in an unplanned way, to explore and learn from the breakdown, what led to it, what will assist the child and inform practice development to hopefully avoid any future repetition. (See Stability Meetings Practice Guidance Appendix 2). Carers and young people must be supported and encouraged to find ways to say goodbye properly and positively and positive memories discussed and kept in an appropriate format (photos etc)

The meeting is convened **one month to 6 weeks after** the placement has ended and should be chaired by an IRO. This will give enough time for reflection and emotions to have been processed at least in part. The meeting will always include feedback from the foster carer and the child/young person, and will also take into account information available from parents and social workers and relevant partners.

The meeting focus is on learning and not blame.

The following action will also be taken:

* Any complaints and other feedback given by children, carers and parents on the quality of care offered will be analysed for usage in future service development.
* Data will be maintained on all forms of breakdowns and analysed on a monthly basis.
* Independent Reviewing Officers will provide scrutiny and will negotiate for improvement in care planning where needed. If necessary he/she will escalate concerns about care planning through the Dispute Resolution Process.
* Corporate Parenting Strategy group will address the outcomes for Children Looked After - giving attention to the goals outlined within the Children Looked After and Care Leaver’s Strategy.
* Unplanned endings will be monitored and included into monthly reports provided by QARU to inform policy and improve practice.

If a stability meeting has been held within 12 weeks of the ending of the child having to leave the foster home, the team manager of the reviewing team may decide that an unplanned endings meeting does not need to take place. In all other incidents of children having to leave foster homes in an unplanned way, meetings should be arranged and learning shared.

# Appendix 1 – Stability Meetings Guidance and Template

Stability meetings are held when it is identified that a placement is at risk of disruption and there is the possibility of an unplanned move for a child or young person in care. It should be convened at the request of the child care social worker, supervising social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer or foster carer as soon as there is a concern that the placement may be in difficulty.

The stability meeting aims to understand what can be done to prevent a child or young person moving and to ensure that all avenues of support and intervention have been explored before agreement is given to authorise a move for a child or young person.

The meeting should be convened within **48 hours** following it being requested. It is chaired by the social work team manager or the fostering team manager. The child care social worker will have responsibility for arranging the meeting and inviting all relevant professionals working as the team around the child (supervising social worker, carer, in house psychologist, IRO, young person, other relevant professionals). As a minimum, the foster carer, the supervising social worker, and the child's social worker will attend. It is chaired by the social work team manager or the fostering team manager.

The child/young person’s views need to be available for the meeting as a minimum and if the child is in regular contact with family then their views should be sought and included too. The principle of ‘nothing about me without me’ must be borne in mind when the social worker considers the child/young persons attendance at the meeting, and whether it is appropriate for them to attend the whole meeting or part only.

Minutes of the Placement Stability meetings will be placed on the young person’s ICS file, foster carer’s file and inform service provision to the young person and carer. The chair of the meeting is responsible for ensuring that minutes are taken and circulated within 3 working days of the meeting.

Minutes of the meeting will be circulated to all the participants, the manager of the fostering team and the Children’s Review Panel administrator for inclusion in the panel agenda.

Actions following stability meetings must be rigorously followed up and there must be no drift or delay in making arrangements. The IRO should check within 6 weeks of the stability meeting taking place to ensure that the actions have been followed up. Fostering Managers and Child Care Team Managers should check progress in monthly supervision.

Any issues not followed through in a timely way need to be flagged with the worker and checked again within 5 working days. If not followed though, the workers manager will be alerted and will then assume responsibility for ensuring the work is completed.

Whilst it may be that a stability meeting concludes that the child/young person has to move from the placement despite all efforts, the stability meeting and follow up discussions need to ensure that the move is done in a planned way and not in a crisis. It is important to learn from every placement that cannot be maintained and disruption meetings must follow.

The supervising social worker will record the outcome of the stability meeting on the foster carers chronology, and the child’s social worker will do the same for the child’s chronology.

Preparation for the meeting:

The chair should familiarise themselves with:

1. Case chronology.

2. Social work assessments

3. Child’s Care Plan / pathway plan

4. CLA placement planning

5. CLA reviews.

6. Foster carers annual review

**The Meeting**

A template is attached to this guidance. The chair should draw together the themes, practice issues and recommendations by considering the following:

* Brief history of the child/young person’s family circumstances, care history so far including all the moves the child has had to make to date.
* What are we worried about, what is making things difficult at this time.
* What is working well and what has been positive and supportive about the child or young person living in this family home.
* What does the child or young person say about where they are living what is good and what is worrying
* What does the foster carer say about life at home what is good and what is worrying for them
* What things are complicating the situation
* Discuss and agree a plan to support the child, young person staying in their current home.
* Timescale for reviewing the agreed plan.

The meeting needs to be carefully minuted with clear actions with timescales, and crucially a date for review within 3 months is set.

**Placement Stability Meeting Template**

Name of Child: Date:

Present:

Agenda

Overview – Brief history

Reason for the meeting (What are we worried about?)

What is working well for the child/young person?

Current situation

Young Persons Views

Foster carers Views

Support in place/required

Plan/Actions to be taken

Next meeting date

1. Overview (Brief history)

2. Reason for the meeting (What are we worried about?)

3. What is working well in the placement?

4. Current situation (What are the complicating factors?)

5. Child/Young person’s Views (What is good and what is worrying)

6. Foster carers Views (What is good and what is worrying)

7. Support in place/required

8. Plan/Actions to be taken

Date for next Stability meeting (within 3 months)

# Appendix 2 – Unplanned Endings Meeting Guidance

Unplanned Endings Meetings

Unplanned Endings meetings are held when a child/ young person is expected to live with a foster family for the long-term and this has ended prematurely and in an unplanned way.

The meeting aims to understand what led to the unforeseen breakdown, to learn from the experience and hopefully avoid any future repetition.

The meeting is convened within one month to 6 weeks of the child having to leave and should be chaired by an IRO, the meeting should take into account, information available from child/ young person, carers, parents and social workers.

Preparation for the meeting:

The chair should familiarise themselves with:

1. Case chronology.

2. Social work assessments

3. Child’s Care Plan / pathway plan

4. CLA placement planning

5. CLA reviews.

6. Foster carers annual review

7. Placement request form

**Format for the meeting:**

The chair should draw together the themes, practice issues and recommendations.

The chair will begin with Introductory remarks - emphasis that this is not a blame meeting, but a learning meeting. Setting the tone to foster respect and understanding is the key to reducing any potential tension in the room.

The chair will then enable consideration of the following:

* Brief history of the child/young person’s family circumstances, reason they are in care and care history so far including all the foster / residential homes the child lived in to date, education and any other key information
* Details prior to living with this family - Was it well chosen to meet the needs of ***this*** child? Experience of the carer? Were there gaps in understanding the child’s needs or what the foster family has to offer? What was put in place to support the arrangements? Were there introductions? Did the FC think they knew all they needed to know before the child came? Was the delegated authority in place? Was there a Placement Planning meeting? How much contact was in place? Were all necessary arrangements in place such as school/contact transport agreed?
* Progress since the child has lived with this family - What was the whole foster family experience? What was the child’s experience? Successes and challenges. What regular additional support if any was provided to child/young person and carer?
* Key contributing factors to the child needing to leave the foster home – When did issues start? Could anything have been done differently at this point? Was there a stability meeting? Consideration to what if anything could have been done differently at any stage to avoid the breakdown. What other agencies have been involved and what was their view? What finally led to the child having to leave? What was the final straw?
* Learning from each individual at the meeting
* How can this information inform us about the kind of home the child needs now and in the future, which will give them the settled experience they need?
* Identify any practice issues or repetition of themes.
* Plan of ongoing support for the child/young person.
* Plan of support to carer.

Minutes of the meeting will be circulated to all the participants, the fostering team manager and the Children’s Review Panel administrator for inclusion in the panel agenda.

Unplanned endings will be monitored and included into monthly reports provided by CQRU by the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting to inform policy and improve practice. Specifically, any learning will be disseminated with the aim of minimising unnecessary moves and promoting stability for children and young people.

# Appendix 3 – Additional Good Practice Guidance

## Definitions and Principles

Permanence: This is at the heart of all care plans with a clearly planned journey through care. Stability and permanence must be achieved at the earliest opportunity.

Attachment: Young people’s secure attachments to carers are very important to their mental health and wellbeing. Continuity of relationships is also important, and healthy attachments should be respected, sustained and developed where this is in the child’s best interests.

Participation: The involvement of children and young people in decision making regarding where they live is essential. The wishes and feeling of children must be taken into account and due weight given, bearing in mind their age and developmental stage. Even if it is not possible to act on the views of a child, social workers should think about all the ways in which they can maximise their participation.

Good Health: This is a priority for our children in care and young adults leaving care; central to all children’s ability to fulfil their hopes and dreams as they develop from childhood and through to teenage years is the need to be well (both physically and emotionally).

Good Education and Stability in Education: Children and young people who come into care are likely to have already experienced high levels of disruption and instability in their lives and the impact of this history will be exacerbated by further instability. A change of school at the same time will disrupt learning, can mean a break from all previous routines, friendship groups and support networks simultaneously. Research shows that looked after children who are in care tend to move schools more frequently than their peers, which has a strong negative effect on attainment and outcomes.

Strong Networks: We must support our children and young adults leaving care to remain in their communities and maintain their networks (if in their best interests) to minimise disruption in their lives. Every child who needs to be looked after will live in or close to their own area as far as possible, unless it is assessed that they will benefit from moving out of area.

Carer Support: Carers should be at the centre of a child or young person’s experience of Corporate Parenting and should provide the mainstay of their support: Every child who needs to be looked after will be cared for by carers who are appropriately supported and developed so that they have the necessary skills and experience to meet their needs. Carers are a central part of the ‘team around the child’.

Children and Young People Support: All children and young people should have a clear risk assessment and a plan to address risks with detailed support services for the carer and child. These plans should be reviewed if there are significant changes or an elevated risk in placement.

Future Planning: Young people should live in homes where they are supported to grow up to be successful young adults: They should ensure that Children Looked After and Care Leaver’s education, employment and training will enable young people to positively contribute to their local community and wider economy and succeed in independence.

## Good Practice – Exploring the child’s network when looking for a home for a child

When looking for home for a young person, it will be important that social workers and the fostering service make good use of chronologies and genograms to check thoroughly if there is anyone in the child’s network who could be approached to care for the child.

If chronologies/genograms are incomplete, it will be important to really explore the child’s network, and consider whether there are any possible friends or family members who could be considered, who could provide some level of care for the child. Family network meetings must take place when children first become looked after and at any time thereafter if it means that they can be supported to live within their family network.

Support from the family network could range from the offer of a home, to overnight/short term support, day care, or respite. Experience has shown that where this work has been done, the service has identified family members and positive adults in the child’s life – including aunts, mentors, teachers who have been able to support and provide homes. This helps to keep children and young people stable and within their known network.

## Good Practice – Choosing the right foster home

It is important that the fostering Service continue to focus on ensuring there is **good understanding of which homes would best suit each individual young person** through good team working and information sharing. Understanding each other’s roles and perspectives during this process is essential. The quality of the relationships between everyone in the team around the child is likely to impact on the outcomes for the child.

For the child’s social worker:

* Ensuring there are good assessments, clear support plans, and careful decision making about what the child needs
* Ensuring carers are provided with more comprehensive information about the child so they can prepare for the placement through **comprehensive completion of the Placement Referral Form.** This will include information about what the young person likes/their aims and aspirations (if age appropriate) as well as information about their behaviour and what upsets or troubles them.
* Foster family finding will, as far as possible, be planned through social workers making the earliest possible referral to the fostering team
* Due to their importance, placement referral forms are quality assured by the social worker’s Team Manager.If the placement officer in the fostering team feels further information is required, they will raise this with the referring team and inform their team manager.
* A high level of information sharing/discussions will take place where possible, to ensure that the placement finders have the information they need to make the best possible match
* Involving children and young people in the decision-making process as far as possible Children will be encouraged and supported to help write their own profiles where possible, which should be attached to/provided with the referral request form
* Increase focus on ensuring children and young people can settle in their homes – ensuring current policies and processes are implemented
* Where possible, carers profile should be reviewed to see whether their young person would thrive living with them.

In making a referral for a placement, the child’s social worker must ensure that high quality and timely information is available to carers on a child to assist the matching process and placement planning, ( including health and education plans).

For the supervising social workers:

* The process to identify the best family for the child as a process to be worked at together, rather than a single event. Placements Officer consults with supervising social worker were possible and time and availability of worker allows (some supervising social workers are part time)
* Working to match the developmental needs of the child with the caregiving required to meet them. There are many criteria to be considered but these should be viewed through the ‘lens’ of the quality of the child’s relationships
* Ensuring foster carers have all the available information about the child during the process of matching and decision making. Identifying what information is needed and the best way to communicate it should be a priority
* Increase focus on making sure children don’t have to move in an unplanned way – ensuring current policies and processes are implemented
* Exploring at an early stage what support the carer may need to meet the needs of the young person; this may be advice on working with exploited children or supporting young people in education. They should also explore how the carer will ensure the young person is able to get to school and how they will support them educationally. Placements Officer consults with supervising social worker were possible and time and availability of worker allows

(some fostering social workers are part time)

* Exploring with the carers and allocated social worker how children and young people can be supported to maintain contact with friends from previous schools or neighbourhoods and if appropriate previous foster carers

A clear process to find the right family is in place, which includes risk assessment and completion of the matching form when the placement is found. A checklist is used by the fostering team to ensure this process is followed.

When the child’s social worker completes a Child’s Placement Referral form, it includes risks which may lead to children becoming unsettled in their foster home, or leading to an unplanned ending. The risk assessment will inform decision making about who the child will go to live with, and ensure that any risks posed are known and can be managed by foster carers. The risk assessment should distinguish between fact and opinion. The context and frequency of risk should be recorded including information from previous assessments, and how these are managed in different environments. An action plan associated with the risks needs to be completed prior to any placement being made.

The fostering team can help the child’s social worker to complete the risk assessment and action plan but it is the responsibility of the child’s social worker to ensure this is done. At the placement planning meeting, the supervising social worker will ensure that the risk assessment is completed for the specific child or young person living in the specific household. Risks may come from a variety of sources and may be external factors to the immediate placement (family/environment, peer relationships, sexual exploitation etc.). The risk assessment should be child focussed and identify how the child/young person can be supported in their development.

Placement Referral Forms must be carefully and fully completed to ensure that all relevant information about the child/young person is known, including health, identity and education. It must be remembered that these profiles are read by foster carers when a foster home is being sought and so must be completed in a way which shows the child’s needs and vulnerabilities, their likes and dislikes, how their past experiences may impact on their current behaviour, and what they need from a carer. Whilst there is a need to honest about the risks, there is a need to show a fostering family why they can make a difference to this child’s life. Although it is important to consider risks that have been identified, caution should be taken in labelling children/young people and the level of current risk should be continuously assessed.

Foster carers should have all the relevant information available to them to decide if they can offer the child a home and how they can provide safe and high-quality care for the child/young person.

The child/young person should also be involved depending on their age and level of understanding and their attitude to risks identified.

**Once a foster home has been chosen**

Foster carers should complete an individualised Safe Care Plan with the support of their supervising social worker each child/young person in their care and this should be regularly reviewed in supervision with the foster carer. The Safe Care Plan should include agreed measures that can be put in place to manage and reduce risk. These safe care plans should be reviewed at the annual review.

Whilst a risk assessment will have been undertaken as part of the matching process, the level of risk may change over time and the regular review of risk should take place noting how risk has been successfully managed. Foster carers will make an active contribution to the risk assessment based on their experience of caring for the child/young person.

Changes in risk should be considered as part of on-going work with the child/young person; in foster carer supervision; as part of risk management meetings; and as part of Child in Care reviews.

The Placement Plan should consider the risks and how these will be managed for both planned and unplanned endings.

Good Practice - Finding more permanent foster homes for children

Many children come into care in an unplanned way and therefore are often found a family to live for a very short time whilst longer term plans are made for the child/young person. In some cases, long term fostering becomes the permanence plan for the child. Within long-term fostering, there is an expectation that when a child goes to live in their foster home that if needed, this will continue throughout childhood until the young person leaves care. There is an aspiration that the relationships between the child and the foster family may endure into adulthood and indeed throughout life, on the basis of Staying Put arrangements and voluntary mutual attachments. The importance therefore of this relationship – and the work to find the right family for the individual child cannot be underestimated. There must be no avoidable delays in the process, including getting the recommendation to panel.

In order to ensure that there is no delay, as soon as a decision has been made that a child/young person should go and live with specific carers, the relevant supervising social worker will meet with the child’s social worker to complete the necessary paperwork and ensure that everything that needs to be communicated is communicated. The child’s risk assessment will be updated at this meeting. If a child is to stay long term with foster carers, then they should be matched at the fostering panel. Full details can be found in the Tri-X of the responsibilities and papers required for this. If a young person is placed with independent foster carers, before a match is made at panel, there should be a discussion with the agency about reduced rates.

## Good Practice - Support and Supervision for foster carers

Frequency is as follows:

For newly approved carers: Weekly within the first month of approval/ new placement, then fortnightly for a further month, then 4 weekly for the first year of approval/placement.

For experienced carers: Long term matched placements may be 8 weekly with Team Manager approval, settled placement – minimum of 8 weekly, long term carers who have a new placement do not need to revert back to 4 weekly unless deemed necessary.

Any foster carer request for support needs to be followed up and recorded on their file. Foster carers should expect a response to their request **24 hours**, and same day if the issue is serious.

Foster carer recordings should be kept on foster carers files. These recordings should be regularly reviewed, a minimum of quarterly, followed up where needed and referred to in subsequent discussion or meetings. Supervision and annual reviews must be used to address carers comments, issues and tone of the logs, picking up any underlying issues as well as those expressed more clearly in the notes.

There is a clear focus on **Multi -disciplinary support to placements** and increased partnership with foster carers

The following actions have been identified as a priority:

* Carers in South Gloucestershire will be provided with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children who require therapeutic parenting- and advice and support in managing challenging behaviour. This will be provided through training, development, supervision and support from education, Children’s Social Care, health and Child and Adolescent Services (CAMHs).
* Staff / foster carers who work with children in care will be trained in Attachment and Trauma. Training offer includes ‘Why and How’ training, ‘Butterflies and Bees’ and ACES training.
* When multiple risk factors are identified for a child in their placement, either as they move in or once living in the foster home, a Team around a Child Meeting needs to take place – Foster Carers cannot be left to manage these complex situations on their own. These support arrangements must be reviewed by the IRO as part of the statutory review process.
* The foster carers and children’s support service (FACS) located within the fostering team will play a crucial role in ensuring that there are strategies to support placements from the start and to provide urgent support when a placement is at risk of breakdown.
* Referral to ‘Thinking Allowed’ (South Gloucestershire) psychological support service may be made for carers or young people where placement stability is a concern
* Stability Meetings must be convened within 24 hours when there are concerns that a placement may be becoming unstable.
* EDT is available to carers out of hours where there is a need for social work support. The Foster Carer helpline offers out of hours carer to carer support.
* Therapeutic Supervising social workers provide weekend support for those involved in the therapeutic fostering project.
* An adolescent support service is in development which will provide more robust support where there are placement stability concerns
* Ensure existing protocols and procedures are followed for children in care eg missing protocol
* When a young person is engaging in criminal behaviour and misusing substances a risk and impact assessment should be undertaken in relation to the needs of the foster family.
* SERAFs to be completed for those at risk of CSE.

## Good Practice - Involving Children and Young People

In South Gloucestershire, we will work with children and young people following the principle – ‘Nothing about me without me’. Therefore we agree to the following:

* When planning placement changes, the child or young person's wishes will be fully taken into account, along with consideration of their best interests. If the wishes of the child cannot be acted upon this will be explained to the child or young person and these reasons recorded by the child’s social worker.
* The child’s IRO will ensure children and young people are aware of their right to access advocacy services when a review decision is likely to overrule their wishes and feelings. The child or young person should also have enough notice of any planned change to arrange for an advocate to support them in their review meeting.
* Children and young people will be consulted regarding levels of family time and time with friends and due weight given to these in accordance with their age, understanding and best interests.
* Where previous placements have broken down therapeutic preventative support should be considered as part of a placement package of support.
* Where it has been assessed that young people need access to therapeutic support, referrals need to be made in a timely way. Delays in obtaining therapeutic support can affect the placement significantly. Referrals need to be followed up and escalation processes need to be considered if the delay is having an impact on the child and their placement.
* All children in long term placements need to have Life story work. Where there are complexities, consideration should be given to involving the therapeutic life story worker.
* The child’s social worker will ensure that all children who are accommodated will have a words and picture narrative which can be built upon once their permanence plan becomes more apparent.
* When children & young people move placement, the previous carer will produce a one page profile with the child with important things for the next carer to know, for eg their likes and dislikes, favourite food, fears and phobias, trigger issues, hobbies, clubs, important people to them, anniversaries of events etc to be passed on to next carer or respite carers.

Children will also actively influence service delivery:

• In South Gloucestershire the Children in Care Council will be used to ensure that leaders and managers are informed of the relevant issues for young people in placements or receiving a service as care leaver.

• Issues raised will shape the service design and improve the quality of service provided.