**West Sussex – Practice Guidance**

IROs are qualified social workers with at least five years’ experience, and who have acquired the right skills to carry out this role.

**Permanence Planning**

<https://www.proceduresonline.com/westsussex/cs/g_perm_plan.html> Click on the link above to access the full procedures on Permanence Planning.

The Permanence Planning Practice Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Children Looked After Procedures and Practice Guidance – Section 4: <https://www.proceduresonline.com/westsussex/cs/contents.html> to ensure that all processes are followed correctly. The information will not be repeated within this document.

**Defining Permanence**

Permanence is the long term plan for the child’s upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. It aims to ensure a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that will give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging throughout their childhood into adult life.

**Key Objectives in Permanence Planning**

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. It is also important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives although they may not wish (for a variety of reasons) to be in a foster home or to be adopted.

**Procedures Reference: 4.1.4 Section 2 - Key Objectives in Permanence Planning**

**When Does Permanence Planning Start?**

Permanence Planning starts as soon as a child becomes looked after, whether they are s20 or subject of a legal order. All looked after children must have a Permanence Plan, in order to prevent them from drifting in care and ensuring that they have the opportunity to maximise their full potential.

Developing a Permanence Plan is a staged process involving parallel planning, where a number of options are explored at the same time (twin or triple track planning) before a final decision can be made. Clear timescales must be set for the implementation of the plan, whether it is for the child's return home, preparation for independence or for permanency through adoption, fostering, a Child Arrangements Order or a Special Guardianship Order.

The Permanence Plan should be developed by the child’s second Looked After (CLA) Review meeting. A single plan should be confirmed by the third Looked after Review meeting. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will consider and endorse the proposed Permanence Plan as part of the CLA Review process.

**Options for Permanence**

In planning for Permanence, the ‘Permanency Options Grid’ below may help to outline the issues to consider for each option:

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* Staying/Returning Home

The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need to support them staying together. Staying at home or reunification usually offers the best chance of stability. This has to be balanced against the risks to the child of remaining in a family that is failing to meet the child’s needs.

* Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons

If assessments conclude that a child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure a placement with a suitable family or friend carer/s. This will be either as part of the plan to work towards a return home or, if a return home is clearly not in the child's best interests, as the preferred permanence option. It is very important to establish at an early stage which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child, to avoid delays which can happen during court proceedings where this work has not been carried out.

The Family and Friends Care Policy, Procedures and Guidance cover the range of Family and Friends Care options but have a specific focus on Viability Assessments and Special Guardianship Orders as permanency planning options for children on the edge of care and children looked after. <https://www.proceduresonline.com/westsussex/cs/files/f_f_care_policy.pdf>

* Adoption

A plan for adoption has to be agreed by the relevant Service Lead and then the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Three Adoption Panels are scheduled for each month, and are held in Bognor Regis on a Tuesday. The Adoption Panel Advisor offers advice to Social Workers, the Agency Decision Maker and Panel to ensure compliance with statutory guidance, legislation and good practice.

When an adoption plan is part of the parallel planning for a looked after child, consideration should be given to inviting a representative of the Adoption Service to the relevant meeting. Family Finding should begin as soon as adoption is under consideration, and before the Agency Decision Maker decides that the child should be placed for adoption or a Placement Order is made.

In the case of siblings, an early decision should be taken as to whether it is in the best interests of each child to be placed together or separately, and the impact on each child of that decision. The decision should be based on a balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child.

<https://www.proceduresonline.com/westsussex/cs/p_place_adop.html#1.-planning-for-permanence>

(see separate Practice Guidance on ‘Together or Apart’ Assessments’)

A relinquished child is usually a baby or an unborn baby, whose parents are making the choice of adoption for the child. In relation to a relinquished child, an early planning meeting should be arranged including a representative of the Adoption Service. Where adoption is considered to be the preferred option for a relinquished child, Family Finding should begin immediately in order to achieve early placement following the decision.



* Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters (see separate guidance)

Fostering for Adoption is used for babies and children who are either in Local Authority care or who are due to be born, where they are likely to be adopted but who still have a chance of being reunited with their birth family. Early permanence planning is designed to provide children with good quality, uninterrupted and consistent care while detailed assessments of their birth family are completed and the court decides on the plan for the child.



* Long-term Fostering

A plan for Long Term Fostering has to be agreed by the relevant Service Lead. This option is particularly useful for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the finality of adoption and where the carers wish for the continued involvement of the Local Authority. It is also a formal option for those children and young people who are considered harder to place.

The assessment and planning process for long-term foster care should address the child’s current needs and likely future needs, and the capacity of the foster carer to meet these needs now and in the future. The length of placement will vary according to the child’s age and the long-term plan for the child, including the transition to adulthood.

Where a child is placed with long term carers, it is important that the child has access to the friends, family or community within which they were brought up and which form part of their identity and their long term support network. For these reasons children should be placed in local provision wherever possible.

* Staying Put

A Staying Put arrangement is where a former relevant child, after ceasing to be looked after, remains in the former foster home where they were placed immediately before they ceased to be Looked After, beyond the age of 18.

* Special Guardianship

Special Guardianship addresses the needs of a significant group of children, who need a sense of stability and security within a placement away from their parents but not the absolute legal break with their birth family which is associated with adoption. It will also provide an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

Special Guardians have parental responsibility for the child and although this is shared with the child's parents, the Special Guardian has the legal right to make all day to day arrangements for the child. The birth parent seldom exercises Parental Responsibility in this situation.

* Child Arrangements Orders

A Child Arrangements Order may be used to increase the degree of legal permanence in a placement with family or friend carer/s or a long-term fostering placement, where this would be in the child's best interests. A child arrangement order enables parental responsibility to be shared more equally with the parents than with Special Guardianship which in some cases may be a more appropriate arrangement.

* Residential

A plan for a Residential Placement has to be agreed by the relevant Service Lead. For a small number of looked after children settled residential care can be an option of choice. These children may have additional needs or special needs which cannot be met in a family setting, older children who have had a significant number of family placements and disruptions or children whose behaviour means it can be difficult to care for them in a family setting.

* Semi-independent Living

Support for children between the ages of 16 and 25 that provides a pathway between care and independence.

**Procedures References: 4.1.4 Section3 - Options for Permanence; Section 4 - Permanence and Local Placement/ 4.2.3 Placements in Foster Care Section 9 - Long Term Foster Placement/ Practice Guidance Reference: Staying Put Arrangements; and Out Of Area Placements; Relinquished Children; Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters;** [**Placement for Adoption Procedure**](https://www.proceduresonline.com/westsussex/cs/p_place_adop.html)

**Legal and Permanence Planning**

In the event that a Social Worker is significantly worried about the safety of a child when living with their main carer, the first step is to consult with their Practice Manager and Group Manager to determine whether threshold has been met to make a referral to the (**1) Legal Gateway Panel Meeting**. The meetings take place every week in Horsham, Worthing and Bognor.

However, if immediate legal action is required, a decision outside of the Legal Gateway Panel should be made by a Service Lead. This decision should be recorded on Mosaic as a ‘management oversight’ decision and a summary of the discussion recorded on the same day or as soon as possible after this by either the Group Manager or Service Lead.

All children subject to Public Law Outline, Pre-Proceedings and Care Proceedings should have a **(2) Permanence Planning Meeting**, if they have not already been considered at the Legal Gateway Panel Meeting. Prior to final evidence being completed within Care Proceedings a Review Permanence Planning Meeting must be held and the final Care Plan options presented to the Group Manager.

In the event that permission is being sought for a child to become looked after, or a child has become looked after on an unplanned emergency basis, then a referral needs to be made to (**3) Children Looked After Monitoring (CLAM) Panel.**

1. Legal Gateway Panel Meeting

The Legal Gateway Panel is an internal decision making process for children who are likely to become subject to Public Law Outline (PLO) or an application to the court is being considered. The main aims are to ensure that the legal framework is adhered to and to achieve timely outcomes for children within Pre-Proceedings (maximum 12 weeks) and Care Proceedings (maximum 26 weeks).



In the event that the decision is to start Pre-Proceedings, the Panel will agree:

* Date of when the Public Law Outline letter to parents will be delivered
* Date of Initial Meeting Before Proceedings (MBP)
* What assessments will be commissioned and dates for when these will be completed
* Review date of progress.

In the event that the decision is to issue Care Proceedings, the Panel will agree:

* Date of when the initial statement and care plan will be sent to legal
* Details of what further assessments will be recommended within the care plan
* Proposed contact arrangements for the initial care plan
* Local Authority plans for parallel planning during proceedings

The Group Manager will maintain close oversight for the 12 weeks following the Legal Gateway Meeting to ensure that plans are adhered to and will re-visit the risk level in supervision monthly with the Practice Manager to ensure the safety of the children.

1. Permanence Planning and Review Meetings

The purpose of a Permanence Planning Meeting is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them throughout their childhood and beyond. Consideration is given to each of the Options for Permanence (as outlined above) and a parallel plan is developed for each child.

The Permanence Planning process is led by the Permanence Planning Coordinator. However, any decision regarding each child’s Permanence Plan is the responsibility of the relevant Group Manager and/ or Service Lead and when required the Agency Decision Maker.

Prior to final evidence being completed for all children subject to Care Proceedings, there must a Review Permanence Planning Meeting, to provide recommendations to the Group Manager in relation to the final care plan and the long term contact proposals.

The Permanence Planning Coordinator is responsible for:

* Tracking the Permanence Plans for all children subject to Care Proceedings and unborn babies within the Public Law Outline process
* Chairing Permanence Planning meetings and Reviews
* Minute taking, distribution, and uploading onto Mosaic
* Notifying the Placement Finding Team when a Permanence Plan has been agreed. However, in the event that a Permanence Planning Meeting has not taken place, the Social Worker must notify the Placement Finding Team via phone (0330 222 2322) and email that a placement is required, especially when a same day placement is required. Authorisation for a placement to be sought can only be provided by a Service Lead and evidence of this authorisation can be provided to the Placement Finding Team via email or on Mosaic.

In exceptional circumstances, whereby children have become looked after in an emergency, a Permanence Planning Meeting must be scheduled to ensure all permanence options are considered within set timescales. The plan must clearly indicate which options form part of the parallel plan, together with proposed timescales to reach a single Permanence Plan.

Assessments of a child's needs in relation to their Permanence Plan must: focus on outcomes; and consider the child's and family's needs for long-term support and the child's needs for links, including contact, with their parents, siblings, and wider family network.

 

1. Children Looked After Monitoring (CLAM) Panel

This panel is a decision making panel where Senior Managers agree the following:

* Permission for child/young person coming into foster care/residential care under section 20
* Or retrospectively Review the decision for a child who has come into foster/residential care on an unplanned emergency basis – the case must be presented to panel within 7 working days of coming into care
* Review of plan whilst in foster care/IFA foster placement under section 20 where care plan is a return home
* Permission to seek supported lodgings for children not already looked after
* Review all residential placements
* Review any unregulated placements and Review if a placement should be considered section 20



**Permanence Planning Tracking**

There is a Permanence Planning Tracking Meeting held on the last Friday of every month. This is led by the Permanence Planning Coordinator and aims to ensure that permanency planning for children is progressed with the pace and urgency that is needed, including achieving legal or emotional security for children and young people.

The Permanence Planning Coordinator Reviews the groups of children listed below by reading all available information on Mosaic and subsequently updating a tracking spreadsheet prior to the monthly meetings. If there are immediate safeguarding concerns, these will be raised with the allocated Social Worker, Practice Manager and if necessary the relevant Group Manager. For example: if a high risk unborn baby is due and there is no safety plan in place for the birth. A case note will also be added onto Mosaic.

* Unborn babies
* Parent and Child Foster Placements
* Children subject to section 20 who are not within the Children with Disabilities Team and aged under the age of 14 (excluding Parent and Child Foster Placements). Highlights children to be presented to CLAM/ Legal Gateway Panel
* Children in Foster Care who are subject to a Full Care Order and have been in the same placement for over 12 months. Consideration is given to whether a permanence decision around the placement is appropriate
* Children Placed With Parents on a Care Order or an Interim Care Order

There is a separate process for tracking the following groups of children with the care plan of adoption.

* Foster For Adoption Placements
* ADM Agreement to Adoption but no Placement Order granted in Court
* Children with a Placement Order who have not yet been placed
* Children who are placed for Adoption but an order has not yet been granted
* Number of External Adoptions

I have not been able to find out who tracks the remaining children who are subject to Section 20; Long Term Fostering placements; children over the age of 16

I have not been able to locate a terms of reference for this meeting – Hazel thinks that Traciy Fogarty may have produced a document but this will have changed due to the fact that the Adoption Team now have a separate tracking process.

Permanence Planning Pathways and Parallel Workflow



**Procedures References: Appendix 1: Identifying Permanence Options ; and S.8 Children and Social Work Act 2017 amends section 31(3B) Children Act 1989**

**Mosaic Tasks linked to Permanence Planning**

Once the decision has been made to issue Care Proceedings and/or for a child to become looked after, workers must complete the relevant parallel processes on Mosaic (e.g. CLA/ Adoption/ SGO). Tasks may include: ART referral form for a placement; Social Workers Report for LAC Review; CLA Care, Placement and Pathway Plan; Initial and Review Health Assessments; PEP; Child or Young Person's Adoption Plan; Child Permanence Report; Viability Assessments.

When a Supervision Order and/ or Child Arrangement Order are granted, then the Child and Family processes must be triggered on Mosaic. This will ensure that Child in Need Visits, Meetings and Reviews can be tracked and that a purposeful Child and Family Plan can be developed with family and relevant professionals.

<https://www.proceduresonline.com/westsussex/cs/p_cin_plans_rev.html>

In the event that the Permanence Plan is for a child to live in a long term foster placement, the following form needs to be completed on Mosaic to support the request for that placement to become permanent.

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**Reference Points:**

**West Sussex Children’s Services Procedures:**

1. All Children

1.3.3 Family Network Meetings

1.4 Child in Need

3.4 Family and Friends Care

4 Children Looked After

4.1 Decision to Look After and Care Planning

4.1.4 Permanence Planning Guidance

5.2 Adoption and Permanence Services

5.2.3 Placement for Adoption

4.8.2 Staying Put