

Long Term Fostering Guidance and Process

Updated November 2020

Introduction

Lambeth's ambition in respect of achieving permanence for children who become looked after is 14 months and set out in the Permanence Policy and Strategy:

- Permanence is the central focus of our services for children looked after
- Every child who enters our care will live with a permanent carer, able to support them successfully throughout their childhood, and into adulthood, without delay
- For many children this will mean returning home to their parents
- For children who cannot return home, we will consider the full range of permanence options, including adoption, special guardianship and long-term fostering
- We will place children within their own families if suitable family members can be identified
- We will place children with their brothers and sisters whenever this is the right thing for them

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2015 amend regulation 2(1) of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 by inserting the following:

““long term foster placement” means an arrangement made by the responsible authority for C to be placed with F where—

- (a) C's plan for permanence is foster care,
- (b) F has agreed to act as C's foster parent until C ceases to be looked after, and
- (c) the responsible authority has confirmed the nature of the arrangement to F, P and C,

and any reference to the responsible authority placing C in such a placement includes, where C is already placed with F, leaving C with F in a long term foster placement;”;

““plan for permanence” has the meaning given in regulation 5(1)(a);”.

The sections below describe the steps to be taken to identify long-term fostering as the care plan and for children to be matched. The process has three stages:

1. Deciding that long-term fostering should be the permanence plan
2. Identifying a suitable long-term foster carer, or carers
3. Making the match and confirming this to the child and the carer(s)

The foster carer's agreement that the arrangement is to last for the rest of the child's childhood, and their clear understanding of the commitment this requires, are essential to the success of any long-term fostering arrangement.

Deciding that long term fostering should be the permanence plan

The decision that the permanence plan should be long-term fostering should be made in a permanence planning meeting. This meeting must be clear about, and record in detail, the reasons for this being the chosen plan. The looked after review must then endorse the plan as being the

appropriate permanence plan for the child. A review should be brought forward if necessary to avoid delay. Permanency Planning meetings are held within 2 weeks of the child becoming looked after and then 6 weekly until permanency has been achieved. Sometimes, PPMs can occur more frequently to avoid drift and delay with permanency planning.

For children placed with connected persons foster carers, special guardianship or adoption is likely to be a more appropriate permanence plan than long-term fostering. Where long-term fostering is preferred, the reasons for this must be clearly and carefully recorded.

For siblings, decisions about the permanence plan must pay particular attention to the effects of the decision on the relationships between the siblings, considering the needs of each child individually to secure the best possible outcomes for each child.

Examples of situations in which long-term fostering might become the permanence plan are given below. These examples are not exhaustive.

Circumstances	What Might Be Considered?
There are no family members able to care for the child	A family group conference has been held and any assessments of family members carried out, but no family members have been found to be suitable carers.
A recent adoption placement has disrupted	The reasons why the adoption broke down must be carefully considered to determine the likelihood that another adoptive placement might also be at risk of breaking down <i>NB If the plan is changed, the agency decision maker must be asked to re-consider the plan for the child to be adopted, and the case returned to court for the placement order to be revoked</i>
Child is under 10, and has frequent contact with family members and/or strongly identifies with the birth family	This can create significant difficulties, both for the adopters, who may feel they cannot 'claim' the child as they would want to, and for the child, who may feel split in their loyalties. While these issues are not insurmountable, very careful planning will be required to make sure the placement will be sustainable
Child is over 10	There is no reason why adoption should be ruled out for older children as a matter of course, but it does need careful consideration and planning. In particular, there are fewer adopters who want to adopt older children, meaning the search could take a long time or be completely fruitless. The child will have a good understanding of the plan, and will realise that no suitable families have been found. The child is also likely to have existing relationships with family members that could make attaching to a new family difficult, or at the least cause feelings of disloyalty which can be difficult for both carers and child and undermine the placement.
All attempts to identify potential adopters for the child have failed	Children cannot wait forever for a suitable family to be identified; equally the search should not be abandoned prematurely. The reasons why the search has not been effective should be carefully considered, to make sure that there are no failings in the approach that has been taken to the family-finding.

	<p><i>NB If the plan is changed , the agency decision maker must be asked to re-consider the plan for the child to be adopted, and the case returned to court for the placement order to be revoked</i></p>
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Identifying a suitable long-term fostering placement

In many cases - where it is in the best interests of the child and subject to careful planning - children remain with an existing foster carer and the arrangement is matched as a long-term arrangement. In others, a process of family-finding – very similar to that for adoption – is undertaken to identify a suitable family. In all cases long-term fostering placements are carefully matched.

The Fostering Recruitment Team within the Fostering and Permanence Service undertakes family finding for long-term fostering, working with the social worker to produce a fair and balanced profile which the family finding social worker uses to generate interest by circulating the profile to fostering agencies including our own fostering service. All positive responses are checked by the placements team to check that the fostering agencies are good or better. The family finding social worker will then send the positive responses to the child’s social worker and meet with the social worker to discuss potential matches. This meeting needs to take place promptly following receipt of responses due to the demand of foster placements. The final decision on potential matches rests with the child’s social worker and team manager.

Before a match with an independent fostering agency carer can be progressed the Access to Resources/Placements team and commissioning colleagues will broker an agreement with the fostering agency which identifies the future costs of the placement and the support to be provided by the agency.

To progress the match, the social worker and the carer’s supervising social worker meet to complete a matching report (appendix one) and a fostering support plan which addresses the child’s current and likely future needs, the capacity of the foster carer to meet those needs both now and in the future, and details of the support that will be required to achieve this. This report should be endorsed by the social worker’s team manager and the independent reviewing officer. The foster carer will be supported by their supervising social worker through the panel, matching and introduction process. *NB Evidence suggests that, whatever the placement, providing support to carers is key to achieving permanence and avoiding disruption, and to enabling carers to therapeutically parent children who have experienced loss and maltreatment.*

If the proposed carers are not approved as long term carers then the appropriate panel must be asked to change their approval before the match can be agreed.

Making the match and confirming this to the child and the carer(s)

There are **two** routes to recommending that a match should be made and confirming this. In most cases for children aged 15 and under this will be through the **Fostering and Permanence Panel**, but for some young people aged 16 and 17, it will be more appropriate for the recommendation to be made outside panel and through the **16+ matching process** and ratified by the agency decision maker (ADM). For this age group there will be discretion to keep the matching low-key, as it is recognised this may be more appropriate where the young person has close links with their birth family and may feel compromised by being matched with foster carers. However, the decision on

Long-Term matching would still be made by the Agency Decision Maker, and the young person and foster carer would still receive acknowledgement of the change of status of the placement to include a letter confirming the decision of the Agency Decision Maker.

The Fostering and Permanence Panel

A recommendations about the suitability of a long-term fostering match is made by the panel, and the decision then made by the agency decision maker (ADM).

In addition to the **Matching Report** (appendix one) the panel will need the following information to make a recommendation:

- A child permanence report (CPR). This is particularly important if the child has little contact with their birth family and the CPR would be a valuable and cohesive record of birth family members' lives as well as their own. In some circumstances, most likely where children have a good knowledge of and regular contact with their family, the social worker and their manager may feel that the CPR can appropriately be less detailed in terms of family history than that needed for a child who has little or no contact with their birth family.
- The most recent health assessment
- The most recent personal education plan and a school progress report
- The most recent sets of looked after review minutes
- The voice of the the child. If possible, a direct contribution from the child describing his/her wishes and feelings. The social worker should support the child to produce this in whatever format the child chooses ie; drawing, video recording, voice message, letter, text message, etc.
- A profile of the child by the child's current foster carer (including where the current foster carer is also the prospective long-term foster carer)
- A Long Term Fostering support plan. For independent fostering agency carers, details of the agency's agreement to the proposal, and the future financial arrangements
- The foster carer's most recent annual fostering household review, panel minutes and ADM decision. *NB if carers are not approved as long term carers then the appropriate panel must be asked to change their approval before the match can be approved. For independent fostering agencies this would be their own panel and timescales for this will need to be discussed and agreed at the permanency planning meeting.*
- Any other document which would assist the panel and agency decision maker to understand the reasons for the match ie; reports from therapeutic services, mentor.

Panel and ADM dates are arranged by the panel advisor and administrator. The paperwork must be collated, signed and with the panel advisor at least two weeks before the panel date.

NB Where the proposed match involves a move to a distant placement (i.e. a placement in a local authority which is not adjacent to Lambeth), the final decision about moving to the matched placement rests with the Director of Children's Services. Those involved must make sure that the matching documents address the issues set out in section 11 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations¹ and associated guidance².

16+ matching process

The decision to match for long term fostering must be agreed at a Permanency Planning Meeting and clearly documented on the PPM mosaic workflow. *NB The young person shall be invited to attend part of this permanency planning meeting and their views, wishes and feelings clearly captured on the document. It is important that prior to the PPM, the social worker has explained the purpose of the meeting and prepared the young person.* Following the PPM, a young person looked after review shall be arranged or brought forward to endorse the match and make a recommendation to the ADM for an out of panel decision.

Within 15 days of the young person's review, the matching information must be submitted to the panel advisor. The ADM will need the following information to make an out of panel ADM decision:

- The mosaic PPM minutes. These should clearly outline the reasons and merits for the match and include all significant individuals' views, wishes and feelings about the match; the young person's needs and how these will continue to be met long term.
- The voice of the child and foster carers views on the match must be provided. *This could be a letter or piece of direct work from the child with their wishes and feelings about remaining long term with their foster family together with a letter from the Foster Carers confirming their commitment to the child throughout their minority.*
- The CLA review minutes recommending the match
- The Long Term Fostering Support Plan. This is completed jointly by the SW and SSW and for independent fostering agency carers, details of the agency's agreement to the proposal, and the future financial arrangements
- The child's recent medical assessment
- A recent Pathway Plan
- The foster carer's most recent annual fostering household review, panel minutes and ADM decision. *NB if carers are not approved as long term carers then the appropriate panel must be asked to change their approval before the match can be approved. For independent fostering agencies this would be their own panel and timescales for this will need to be discussed and agreed at the permanency planning meeting.*
- Any other document which would assist the agency decision maker to understand the reasons for the match ie; reports from therapeutic services, mentor, education report etc.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/959/contents/made>

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf

After the decision

- Once the decision has been made, the ADM will write to the carers and the child confirming that the match has been agreed.
- A Matching Certificate will be prepared by the Panel Administrator
- If applicable and where the child is moving to new carers, the Fostering family finder will support the social worker to draw up a transition plan for the child's move.
- The social worker should arrange a suitable celebration with the child and the carers to mark the occasion.
- The social worker must ensure that the child's placement code is correctly recorded on Mosaic to reflect the long term placement
- The social worker must update and complete the Permanence Tracker on Mosaic to reflect the key dates and date of ADM decision and permanence achieved.