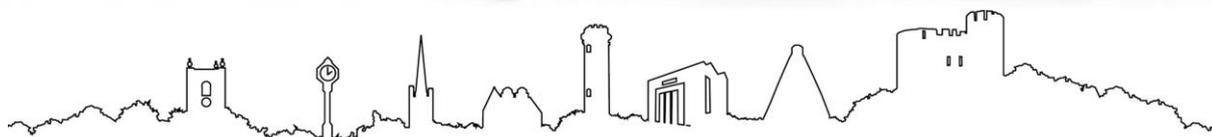


Children first and at the heart of all we do

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

PERMANENCE STRATEGY

*Throughout childhood
and beyond*



INTRODUCTION

This strategy outlines our commitment that every child will be supported through our intervention and activities to achieve a safe, stable and loving home as early as possible, which will provide them with every opportunity to thrive throughout their childhood and beyond.

Permanence Planning is not a stand-alone or additional process, it is central to concurrent planning for any child, to prevent unnecessary delay and to ensure that legal processes are timely and fair.

Our practice oversight of these arrangements will primarily be through our Achieving Early Permanence Panel and our strategic oversight through our Permanence Monitoring Panel.

For the purpose of this document, a child is any person under the age of 18.

To achieve early permanence, Dudley MBC will honour the guiding principles of the Children Act 1989, as strengthened by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010:

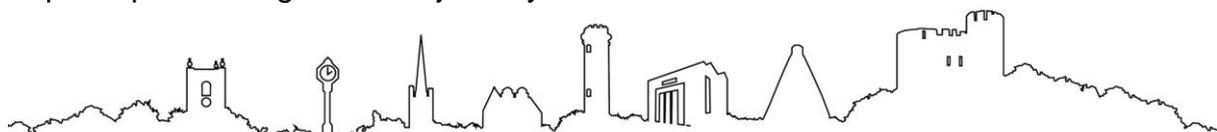
1. The child's safety is paramount
2. We will act in the Best Interest of the Child.
3. We will act without delay
4. We will achieve permanence with the minimum statutory intervention, including No Order.

Our Vision for Children

Every child deserves to grow up, where possible in their family of origin. When this is not possible, every child deserves a permanent home as early as possible to overcome the challenges of adverse childhood experiences and grow into the best version of themselves without relying on statutory intervention.

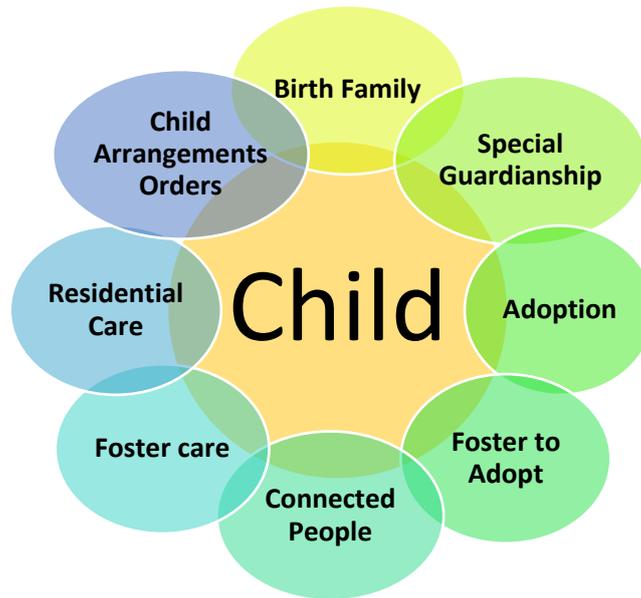
Our Service Objective: Children First and at the Heart of Everything We Do

- We will promote the best interest of each child, their family and their carers.
- We will promote each child's identity and find opportunities for each child to grow up in an inclusive environment, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion or disability.
- We will respect each child, their parents, their carers and people who are important to them.
- We will respect the child's right to privacy and family life and treat their information confidentially.
- We will communicate effectively so that each child and their family understand and participate throughout their journey.



Permanence Pathways

Until the child is living with their forever family under a forever order, all pathways must be revisited to ensure that the plan for the child continues to be the right plan.



What is permanency for children?

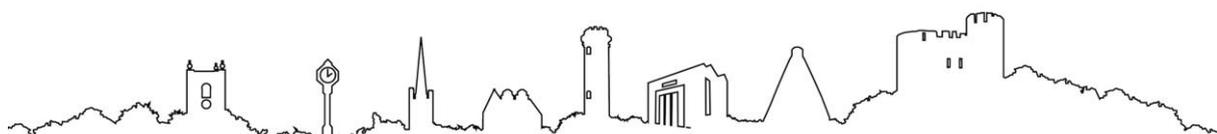
The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (DfE 2015) defines the objective of planning for permanence as:

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.

What does permanency mean for children?

For us, in Dudley, that means living in a safe, stable and loving home with every opportunity to thrive throughout childhood and beyond. It means that the child does not have an allocated social worker **all** the time and that the child and their forever family can make decisions without involving the state. This means:

- Providing a safe, stable, forever home as early as possible in the child's journey.
- Enabling parents or carers to commit to a lifetime loving family environment.
- Helping children to understand their life story and build life-long links to carry them into adulthood and beyond.
- Preserving children's links with their own culture, identity, race, ethnicity, religion and heritage.



OUR OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG WHO MAY NEED TO ENTER CARE OR IN CARE:

1. Permanence start in the first conversation

Children will have rich histories and we will ensure that we get to know them from our first conversation to help us understand all options for permanence including the views and influence of all the people around the child, throughout the child's journey.

2. We will support children to remain living safely with their families.

Children must grow up with their own family, when it is safe to do so. When situational family pressures impact on children's safety, we will, through targeted intervention help maintain children within their families, drawing on the strengths within the family.

Reunification will remain part of concurrent planning for all children until they have reached permanence.

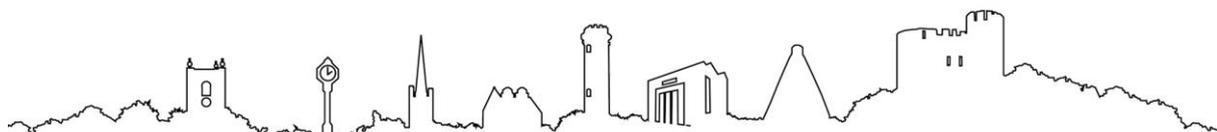
3. Where children cannot live safely with their parent/s we will support families to make their own family plan to look after children

Children have the right to grow up with their families without the state's involvement. To help families make important decisions, we will provide independent Family Group Conferencing to develop family plans without the involvement of the courts.

4. Where children cannot live safely with family members without social work involvement, we will always explore family members or friends who have a connection to the children or where we can establish a connection to the child.

Family and Friends Carers will be assessed in relation to their suitability and ability to meet the child or young person's needs throughout their childhood and beyond.

We will identify family and friends early on, to ensure that there is no delay for children when help is needed. We will provide connected people with a range of options, including family solutions under the no order principal, to ensure that permanence is reached as early as possible



5. We will make alternative care arrangements for children who are not able to live safely within their connected people network

We will aim to provide safe care arrangements for children in a planned way, so that children are matched with carers who are able to meet their needs.

We will aim to find forever homes that meet children’s identity, ethnicity, cultural, religious, disability and language needs either through culturally matched or culturally competent carers.

6. We will ensure that children are at the heart of care planning and their voices will influence our actions

Children will participate in considering their options for permanency. We will consult with children sensitively and appropriate to age and understanding whilst ensuring that decision-making does not fall inappropriately upon them.

We will ensure that children understand decisions and their history by keeping their memories recorded for them.

Not all children are confident in speaking for themselves. We will ensure that children have access to advocacy to make their voices heard.

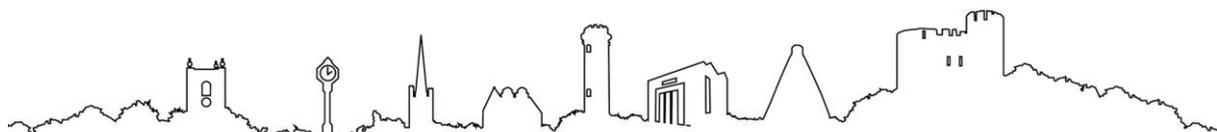
We know we do not always get it right the first time. We will ensure that children know how to complain and give feedback that we will act on.

Children in care and in Private Fostering arrangements have advice and support about their permanency options and plans from the Children’s Rights and Representation Team and/or their Independent Reviewing Officer.

7. We will ensure that children achieve permanence without delay.

From the point where the decision is taken to start the Public Law Outline or within six weeks of a child become looked after (whichever comes first), every child who needs it, will have a Child Permanence Meeting to scrutinise all available options, monitor progress and sign off on options no longer viable.

Permanence will be reviewed every six weeks, until the child is matched and placed with their forever home.



We will ensure that our services, assessment, plans and intervention to achieve permanency will be good quality and based upon evidence-based research and best practice.

Every child will, by their second Child in Care Review have an agreed, written Permanence Plan as part of their care plan.

8. We will maintain links and family time for children with people who are important to them

Family time is key of children to maintain links with their heritage, if it is safe. As children grow and families change, family time can be a good opportunity to re-assess reunification and parental capacity to change later in life.

We will encourage later life links for young people who grow up in care and who do not have the right family links.

9. We value sibling relationships and where it is best for all the children, we will strive to keep sibling groups together.

Brothers and sisters can be one of the most important relationships we form throughout life. Children should know their siblings and where possible, grow up with them.

Children who have had adverse childhood experiences may however develop attachment strategies that can be harmful in a sibling group.

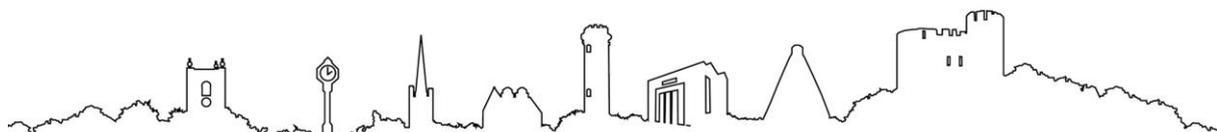
It is essential that each child in a sibling group is considered as a unique individual, with their own needs separately and as part of a sibling group.

It is essential that the whole sibling group's permanence is not prevented because of the competing or differing needs of the whole group.

Where sibling cannot grow up together in one forever home or family, we will make reasonable arrangements for them to spend quality time together throughout their lives.

10. We will ensure that we plan for positive and safe transition into adulthood

Every child deserves to leave care and still feel safe. We will ensure that all children and young people and particularly those with additional needs, are assessed and supported up to the age of 25 years.



SERVICE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCE AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

FAMILY SOLUTIONS

OUR VISION MEANS

1. Parenting Matters

We want babies and young children to have secure attachments to capable, confident parents, to be warm, well fed and be supported in their development, ready to start school.

2. Growing up Matters

We want primary school children to develop friendships and enjoy learning and play, to reach their full potential, and be ready for secondary school. In secondary school we want engaged, emotionally resilient adolescents, achieving their ambitions and setting goals for the future,



and understanding how to get there.

We want engaged young people aged 16+ who are in education, employment or training that matches their ambition and ability, who have respectful relationships and good friends, have skills for independence, and able to see the future positively.

3. Health and Wellbeing Matters

We want all our children and young people to be healthy and safe from all forms of harm including exploitation and bullying, to have secure warm attachments to people who care for them and look out for them, and are enabled to make good choices in their lives.

Family Solutions' primary focus is to ensure that wherever possible children have the chance to grow up with their family. This is largely achieved by offering timely family intervention.

The Edge of Care Service will help prevent children entering care. Family Solutions provides support to children and families when it is safe for a child to return home.

Family Group Conferencing and Family Network Meetings aim to:

- Enable families to identify and develop their own support systems before crisis develops.
- Resolve issues between family members which may result in crises.
- Enable families to identify alternative care arrangements for a child when they cannot live with their birth family in the
- Enable children to safely return to their families without orders or Local Authority Intervention.



DUDLEY DISABILITY SERVICE

Dudley Disability Service is an all age disability service, providing joined-up support to people, from birth to old age.

The aim of the service is to support children, young people and adults with special educational needs, learning or physical disabilities, or autism to achieve a full and happy life, where possible, with their families.

A life in which they are independent, gain skills and knowledge and have a confident and sociable life.

The service works in partnership with each person it supports to ensure that it meets their needs, desires and aspirations.

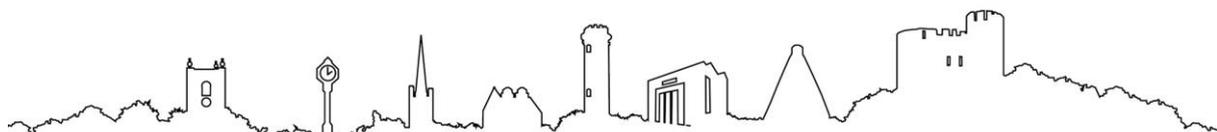
We want people to be supported in the way they want so they can achieve their own goals and the lifestyle they choose.



CHILDREN IN NEED AND CHILDREN IN NEED OF PROTECTION



- When children need protection, we will help families to recognise the danger to their children.
- We provide intervention with the aim to keep children safe at home, with their families.
- Where the multi-agency assessment concludes that children cannot be kept safe at home, we will continue to work with families, to get them stronger, so that children can safely return home.
- When children cannot safely return home, we will work with families to identify suitable alternative carers within the extended family and connected people.
- We will use appropriate legal processes and the courts to ensure that children and their families are fairly represented.
- If we cannot identify suitable family or connected people, we will work towards a forever home outside of the family.



No Order Principle

Based on Family Group Conference and Family plans, the children are cared for by extended family, without local authority intervention.

Child Arrangements Orders and Special Guardianship Orders

- Dudley MBC will fund an initial consultation for family members to seek legal advice.
- When children cannot safely return home, but the family helped to identify safe alternative carers within the family and friends' network and the family require an order, we will complete appropriate assessments and make recommendations to the family courts.

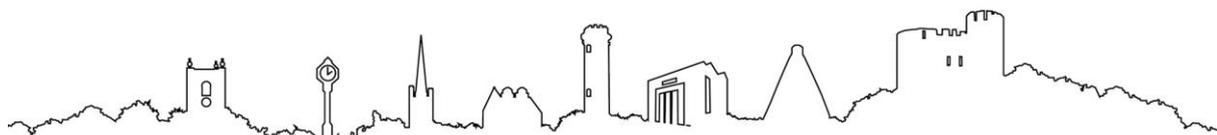
Specialist Assessments

- We will further develop our social workers as experts to undertake holistic assessments which help us understand how best to support parents to parent safely.
- We will undertake or commission appropriate specialist assessments to help us understand how best to help parents to learn to safely parent, including cognitive assessments, psychiatric assessments, mother-and-baby assessments, alcohol-and-drug testing, DNA testing, together and apart assessments, etc.
- Where children remain home under an Interim or Full Care Order, the Placement with Parents Regulations must be followed with appropriate authorisation by the agency decision maker.

CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Service

- The Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Service is responsible for children
 - where Dudley MBC shares parental responsibility with the parents (S31 Care Order),
 - where parents ask Dudley MBC to look after their children (S20 Voluntary Accommodation), or
 - when young people ask to be accommodated in Dudley's care (S20 Southwark ruling)
- Children are at the heart of the service; they will inform decision making and co-produce their profiles, care, permanence plans and pathway plans.



- The focus is that every child will have a forever home and the Service will provide timely, evidence-based interventions to enable children to grow up safely with stability and high aspirations.
- The service will facilitate placement stability meetings and learn from unplanned and untimely endings to placements
- The Service will work alongside Fostering, Placements, Lighthouse Links, the Virtual School, Health Services, Youth Offending, Family Solutions and other services, to provide wrap around support and intervention so that every child in care and care experienced young person can achieve safety and stability with high aspirations.
- The Service will work alongside Adult Services, including Dudley Disability Service to ensure smooth transitioning between childhood and adulthood.

Fostering

Home Linking Team

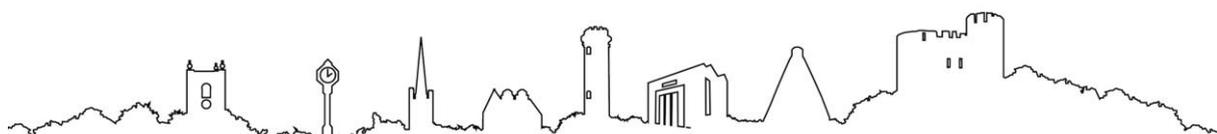
- The Home Linking Team consists of a small group of Home Linking agents who work alongside provider services to identify potential matches to children's needs.
- We negotiate to help bring a child's voice, specific needs and care plan to life in the placement identified and set specific expectations for providers i.e. support in reunification, school transport, therapeutic input, family time, key working, additional support, etc.
- If a child's need changes, we will renegotiate with providers to meet additional intervention and support needs.
- We work alongside social workers, commissioners, finance and provider services to ensure that children are appropriately matched to the right home at the right time.



Fostering Recruitment, Assessment and Training

We aim to recruit carers who can meet a different children's needs at different times including:

- Short-term foster carers, who provide care during court proceedings and help children move on to permanence.



- Long-term foster carers, who want to provide children with forever homes and help them achieve high aspirations, stability and permanence, whilst remaining in care.
- Respite carers, who provide short-term relief care so that short-, long-term and family carers can recharge if a child needs consistently high levels of intervention and support.
- Targeted recruitment and care for children who needs a specific type of carer i.e. culturally competent/matched, specific gender/sexuality needs, specific therapeutic interventions.
- The team undertakes the necessary assessments and present carers to the Fostering Panel for approval and matching.
- The team works alongside the Home Finding Team and Child Social Work team to identify and explore matching options for children and carers.
- The team works alongside Commissioning, Communications and the Centre for Professional Practice to deliver the Sufficiency Strategy.
- The team has a significant role in ensuring early permanence and contributes to the Achieving Early Permanence Panel to identify specific recruitment needs.

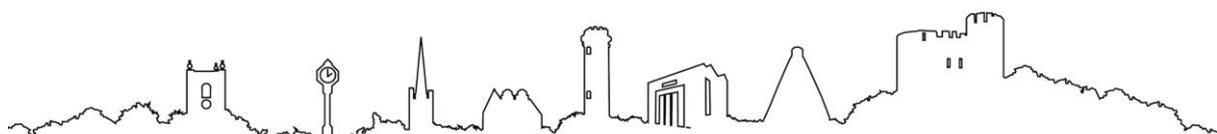
Connected People's Fostering Team

- We undertake Viability Assessments and Connected person/Family and Friends Assessments (Form C).
- If the child has an **existing relationship** with the connected carer, we will assess connected people as special guardians early in the child's permanence planning.
- If carers are approved the children's and young people's placements become subject to Fostering National Minimum Standards, regulations and Schedules.
- We supervise and support Connected Person/Family and Friends approved foster carers and special guardians.
- Where the child's placement is stable and, in the child's best interest, we will support the carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders.

Children's Homes

We have three children's homes in Dudley MBC who provides a range of services to children in care including:

- Short-term care for children where the care plan is reunification. We will work with children, parents and Edge of Care Services to help children and their families learn new strategies to keep children safe at home.



- Step-down care for children who was cared for outside of the local authority jurisdiction to help them accept care and are now ready to return to Dudley.
- Long-term matched care for children who cannot adapt to family life, due to their own adverse childhood experiences and need the non-threatening environment of residential care.
- We will work with social workers, Dudley Lighthouse Links, Edge of Care Services, Youth Offending Services and other wrap around services to help our children accept and trust adults to care for them.

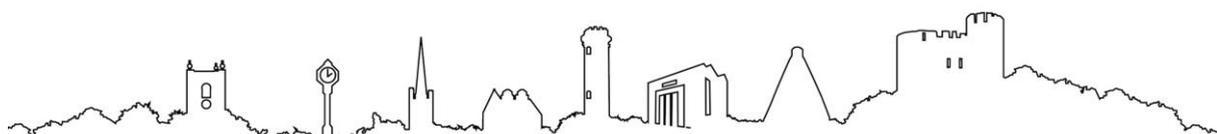
Emotional Health and Wellbeing (Dudley Lighthouse Links)

- We work alongside social workers, fostering social workers, carers (including connected people and children’s homes) to provide children with therapeutic input from a multi-professional, skilled and specialist emotional health and wellbeing professional.
- We attend the Child Permanence Meeting to help identify additional support needs early in the child’s journey through care to reduce factors that prevent appropriate matching.
- We provide therapeutic input to improve placement stability, including crisis intervention to help children and carers through stressful episodes.
- We provide special guardianship support services to increase placement stability throughout childhood and beyond.
- We attend/chair as appropriate, placement stability meetings for inhouse foster carers, connected people and children’s homes and learn lessons for placement breakdown.



The Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption@Heart

- Adoption@heart will provide advice and support in the care planning of children for whom adoption is suitable.
- Adoption@heart will progress early permanence and targeted recruitment of adopters to meet specific needs including, children over four, children from BAME heritage, children who are part of sibling



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groups or children who have disabilities or special health needs.

- Adoption@heart will help identify children who are suitable for Foster to Adopt placements.
- Adoption@heart will approach adopters for new babies where siblings have already been adopted.
- Adoption@heart will undertake specialist input, including therapeutic support to prepare children for adoption.
- Adoption@heart will manage placement stability and learn from disruption or breakdown.
- Adoption@heart will offer post adoption support

Independent Reviewing Service

Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs must hold the local authority and multi-agency partners to account for ensuring children achieve permanence as early as possible.

Unless there is a conflict of interest, a sibling group will have the same Independent Reviewing Officer, who will review their plans until they no longer need it.

Child Protection Chairs have a central role in achieving permanence for children on the edge of care by promoting family solutions without delay and where possible without orders.

The Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure that every child has a permanence plan by their 2nd Child in Care Review and appropriately escalate when there are any delays or barriers in achieving permanence early. They will continue to review the child's plan to ensure all options for permanence without statutory intervention and that the legal status is appropriate.

The Children's Rights and Participation Team



The Children's Rights and Participation team provides independent advice and advocacy for children about their care plans or child protection plans.

Children and young people can ask for support and help to attend meetings about them, to talk about their worries, to talk about what is going well and to talk about their hopes for the future.



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Quality and Audit

The Dudley Centre for Professional Practice will consistently review the quality of permanence planning regardless of the theme or type of audit being undertaken.



Corporate Parenting

The Corporate Parenting Board will review the Council's performance in ensuring early permanence for all children.



Commissioning to achieve early permanence

Our Commissioning team leads on placement sufficiently or children in our care based on children's needs and Dudley's overarching objective to secure permanence early for all children.

