

Care Planning and Permanence Procedures

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Permanence Planning Procedure
3. Further Guidance

Introduction

Walsall Children's Social Care is committed to ensuring that a child's need for a permanent home is addressed and a permanence plan is made at the earliest opportunity.

This Permanence Policy seeks to provide a set of common processes when planning permanence for children and young people who have differing needs, and for whom a range of different placement and legal outcomes are required.

All Permanence Planning informs the Care Plan, which should be the overarching plan for the child. The key points in permanence planning are below and will apply until a final placement and legal permanence is achieved for a child:

- Presentation to Legal Gateway
- Care Planning Meetings
- 2nd Statutory Child in Care Review
- Permanence Panels.

It is our duty to reunify children within the family wherever possible. All support services and resources should be exhausted prior to considering permanence out of the family home. These should take place even if the child has been subjected to urgent care arrangements. Where this is not possible, we must ensure that permanence is achieved in the child's best interests and in the child's timescales. We recognise that any drift and delay will have a negative impact on the child's outcomes.

Robust multi-tracking planning ensures that assessments are completed at the earliest opportunity; in the majority of cases that will be during the Pre Proceedings/Proceedings

stages. There will be occasions where children are Looked After under Section 20. Children who fall under this category, will also be monitored and supported via the tracking process to ensure timely permanence planning and progress.

Permanence Planning Procedure

Parallel Planning

The emphasis on early consideration of permanence plans and avoidance of drift means that we should be parallel planning for children, where efforts are made to rehabilitate/reunify with birth family but, the necessary information is gathered ready to put in place an alternative plan e.g. adoption, if this is not successful.

Social workers are expected to work to this model; working towards a child's return home where appropriate, whilst at the same time developing an alternative Permanence Plan, within strictly limited timescales.

See [Permanence Procedure](#)

Legal Gateway Panel

The first test that the child or young person may not be able to remain with their current carers is held at the Legal Gateway Panel. Social Workers should present the case to Legal Gateway Panel if they wish to enter pre-proceedings or, are wishing to initiate care proceedings with immediate effect. In the majority of cases, children will only enter care after a case has been heard at Legal Gateway Panel and the Care Plan has been agreed. However, we recognise that a minority of children will enter care in an unplanned way, where there is immediate concerns with regard to their safety. These cases should be presented to the first available Legal Gateway Panel following a child coming into our care.

An initial Permanence Plan should be presented to Gateway Panel when referring the case, which is done within the referral (admissions) form.

The preparation for Legal Gateway Panel is key. Social Workers and Team Managers attending the Legal Gateway Panel should ensure that the following documentation has been completed:

- Cultural Genogram
- Chronology
- Referral Form (to include initial Permanence Plan)
- Most recent Child & Family Assessment

The Legal Gateway Panel will make a decision about pre-proceedings or care proceedings being initiated and, will ratify the initial permanence plan. The work/assessments needing to be undertaken and timescales for completion, will be discussed and agreed at Panel. This includes decisions about:

- Family Group Conference and/or Family Network Meeting
- A comprehensive Parenting Assessment (including a PAMS assessment if required)
- Sibling assessments (Together or Apart) if required
- Identification of alternative family/connected carers and to undertake viability assessments
- Psychological Assessments where appropriate
- Drug / Alcohol testing, where required
- Any other assessments

Those cases where decision has been made to enter into pre-proceedings, and those children subject to S20, will be reviewed at Legal Gateway every **12 weeks**. Where circumstances change than the review can be brought forward. Where a decision has been made to initiate care proceedings, Permanence Panels will review and track their progress.

See [Care and Supervision Proceedings and the Public Law Outline](#) and [Section 20 Guidance](#)

Stage 1 Notifications will be sent to the Regional Adoption Agency at this point, if decision is made to enter into care proceedings, and adoption is being considered as one of the contingency permanence plans.

Care Planning Meetings

- Care Planning meetings have been established to support good and timely permanency planning for children and young people. These are professional meetings to ensure:
 - Timely planning takes place avoiding drift and delay
 - Contingency options are actively being pursued
 - Placement planning is realistic
 - Likely placement needs are identified early on so that placement commissioning/finding activity is informed
 - Placement support needs are identified

Decision to make an application to apply for early family finding (court permission must be considered both for adoption and permanent fostering)

Care Planning meetings should take place in respect of all children and young people in care. There can often be several care planning meetings taking place at significant points during the care proceedings process but at the very least, these should be every 6 weeks.

These meetings should be chaired by the social workers Team Manager and include: the social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer and the most appropriate representatives from Fostering or Adoption, given the known needs. Other services with significant input such as Virtual School, CAMHS, should be invited as required. A representative from legal services should be invited to the Care Planning meeting to help in identifying any barriers to securing timely permanence and, also help with making sure the planning is on track to meet Court deadlines as directed in the Court Order. Advocates meetings and further Court Hearings must feed into the Care Planning meetings. The child's Guardian should also be invited to better understand the planning for the child and should be informed as frequently as possible to ensure the process of identifying permanence for the child is transparent.

The Care Planning meetings should consider the following:

- The assessment of the child's current and future needs
- Whether such needs can be met on a permanent basis by a return home or through an alternative substitute
- Where an alternative to a return home is considered; the viability of any possible connected carer placements
- The most appropriate placement type that will meet the child's permanence needs
- The most appropriate legal outcome to ensure permanence in the proposed placement type
- Whether an appropriate range of contingency plans are in place
- Who will do what and when to achieve the plan without delay
- How parents will be kept informed.

Discussions at the Care Planning meetings will be recorded in a Care Planning Meeting Record, which will include actions agreed. These will be reviewed at the next Care Planning Meeting. See **Care Planning Meeting Template**

When a final permanence plan has been identified for a child / young person, the Group Manager will be responsible for ratifying this before the Final Evidence and Care Plan is filed to Court.

Second Statutory Child in Care Review

At the latest, a child / young person must have a Permanence Plan (incorporated into the Care Plan), by their second statutory Child in Care Review. The review will consider the Permanence Plan as part of the Care Plan and ensure that this can meet the child's needs for permanence within realistic timescales.

If assessments have not been completed in time for the second Review, or another option for the care of the child emerges at a later stage of the planning process, a further Review should be convened by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) once the outcome is known, in order that the plan may be ratified as appropriate.

Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

The IRO has a statutory responsibility to chair Child in Care Reviews and to monitor the child's plan on an ongoing basis. An IRO will be appointed to each child within 5 working days of the child coming in care; the initial review will be within 20 working days of the child being in care, following by a second review within 3 months, and then subsequent reviews being 6 monthly.

It is the IRO's role to review and agree the plan for permanence, ensuring that it is the most appropriate for the child. Where it is not possible to identify a single plan of permanence by the second review, timescales will be attributed to the any piece of work that are needed to formulate a single plan for permanence in a timely manner.

The IRO also has a statutory responsibility for monitoring the child's plan outside of the statutory review arrangements to ensure that there is no drift in implementing the permanence plan.

See [Independent Reviewing Officers](#)

Permanence Panels and Tracking

Tracking arrangements are in place for children on the journey to permanence and these are coordinated through the Permanence Panel Meetings. Team Managers and Group Managers are responsible for tracking progress of care plans outside of Panel as well.

The purpose of these Panels are to:

- Ensure permanency planning is progressed in a timely way, with the urgency needed to achieve stability and security for Children and Young People
- Improve timeliness of permanence options for children in proceedings and children already subject to Care Orders, ensuring they have a clear permanency plan as early as possible
- Ensure timeliness of assessments, interventions and support plans

- Ensure children are prepared well for their transition for permanency
- Ensure early permanency options such as Fostering for Adoption, are being considered and progressed at the earliest opportunity
- Identify and address any complicating factors that could lead to delays in securing permanency for the child, at the earliest opportunity.

The Core members of these panels are:

- Head of Service for Children in Care or Help and Protection (Chair)
- Fostering Service - Group Manager or Team Manager
- IRO Group Manager
- Permanence Coordinator
- Case Progression Officer
- Relevant Group Manager and Team Manager
- Business Support (to take minutes)
- Representative from Legal Services

These panels take place weekly and each Team attends Panel on an alternate basis, to discuss children in care within their Team. Each child's plan is RAG rated to indicate progress, timeliness of decisions and, where attention is needed. The Permanence Coordinator follows up actions from these panels to ensure delays and drift are prevented.

Where decisions are made at Legal Gateway Panel to initiate Care Proceedings, the Team Managers for the social workers allocated to them children, attend Permanence Panel 4 weeks from the Legal Gateway Panel taking place and again at 14 weeks. This ensures monitoring and tracking of them children from the onset, that allows for early identification of any barriers or issues that could cause delays in achieving permanence for the child / young within the 26 week court timescale.

Care Planning meetings would be taking place outside of the permanence panels. Where a child's plan has been RAG rated red at a care planning meeting, the plan will be reviewed at permanence panel every 4 weeks to ensure timely progression of the plan. Where there are complicating factors that are leading to delays in achieving permanence for a child, it will be the responsibility of the Team Manager to escalate this to the Group Manager, and liaise with the Permanence Coordinator, to consider resolutions and bring to an earlier permanence panel where needed.

The Permanence Tracker is in place that allows us to monitor the progress of planning and achieving permanence for children and young people. It is used to identify and address delays, and provide key measures of performance and areas of further work relating to Permanence. Information shared at Permanence Panel meetings will be inputted into the Tracker so that accurate data is available when needed.

Fortnightly Panel with Regional Adoption Agency (Adoption at Heart)

Fortnightly panel meetings take place with Adoption at Heart. The purpose of these are to track and progress the adoption plans for children with a SHOBPA decision and where they are subject to Placement Orders. Discussions also take place at these panels regarding children in need of early permanence, where Fostering for Adoption should be considered.

Core members of these panel meetings are: Head of Service for Children in Care, Group Manager with lead for Adoption, Permanence Coordinator, Case Progression Officer, Business Support and the TM or Senior Practitioner of the Family Finding Team at Adoption at Heart.

These panel meetings mean that there are limited delays in progressing children's adoption plans where factors are in our control i.e. factors not related to the care proceedings. There is timely response to Prospective Adopter Reports from social workers, linking meetings are undertaken in short timescales, risk assessments and introduction plans are completed and signed off as required by Group Manager and Head of Service, etc.

These panel meetings also contribute to more children being placed in Fostering for Adoption placements, as children are being identified early and RAA being notified at the earliest opportunity, allowing sufficient planning time to secure appropriate Fostering for Adoption placements where appropriate to do so.

Unborn Tracker Meetings

Unborn Tracker meetings take place every fortnight and comprise of both Children Services and Health professionals (namely midwifery). This is chaired and overseen by the Group Manager from Family Safeguarding.

These meetings allow us to identify the children that require safeguarding (accommodation) at birth. Moreover, early permanence via Fostering for Adoption can be secured for a number of children as a result of the early identification of these children, that allows assessment and intervention to be offered in timely way, and tracking from pre-birth through these meetings.

These meeting also allow early family options to be considered with potential connected carers being identified, viability assessments being undertaken and Regulation 24 or Foster for Adoption placements being considered.

Early notifications should be sent to the Regional Adoption Agency regarding children identified at these meetings, where applicable.

Further guidance

[Decision to Accommodate](#)

[Care Plan Guidance](#)

[Special Guardianship process/guidance](#)

[Long-Term Fostering](#)

[Adoption](#)

[Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters](#)