

Placement Stability Meetings for Looked After Children Procedure

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Children in Care nationally and locally are considered to be amongst the most vulnerable groups of children. Children in Care do less well than their peers in all areas of life and are more likely to encounter adversity in adulthood. Improving outcomes for Children in Care is a priority for the whole Council and partner agencies.
- 1.2 As Corporate Parents, departments within the Council, other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector must work together to improve services and service responses to Children in Care. We should do everything possible to work in partnership to prevent placement breakdowns which can impact negatively on young people. On a service level, every professional who works with, or cares for a Child in Care must take personal responsibility for ensuring that each individual child has their particular needs identified and that provision is made in order to meet those needs.
- 1.3 Of all the needs that Children in Care have, they share one in particular and that is the need for a stable home life. Placement stability is absolutely essential to the lives of these children. Without a safe and stable home, children and young people will continue to achieve less well at school, present challenging and self-harming behaviour, suffer with poor mental health, be more likely to offend and be more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.
- 1.4 Caring for a child who is presenting with challenging emotional and behaviour needs, can have an impact on the whole fostering family. As professionals in their own right foster carers need to feel listened to, supported and fully included in the professional team around the child. Each fostering family will have their own experiences, strengths and skill sets, along with individual stress factors that are unique to each individual family.
- 1.5 One of the means by which we are attempting to support and stabilise placements is by the use of Placement Stability Meetings to enable services which provide placement support to be co-ordinated. Placement Stability Meetings will be used to support any child whose difficulties are such that either their placement and/or their place at school are in jeopardy and ensure that timely and appropriate support is being offered to the foster carers.

Placement Stability Meetings

- 1.6 The term Placement Stability Meeting refers to gathering a number of key people who have a responsibility and/or a contribution to make in order to ensure that a child's needs are consistently met.
- 1.7 The aim of the process is to:-

- Predict the warning signs of placement stress and actively support the placement to avoid breakdown;
- Promote shared responsibility for finding solutions;
- Ensure necessary resources are put in place early on which may avoid future expenditure;
- Bring together a range of professionals and family who can share knowledge and provide creative solutions to difficulties.

The membership of the meeting is likely to differ slightly for each child, depending on their particular circumstances. However, there are certain people who would normally make up the core group for these meetings:

- Foster Carer (or Key Worker if the child is in Residential Care);
- Social Worker;
- Fostering Supervising Social Worker;
- Personal Adviser (if the young person is over 16);
- Someone who can represent the child's educational needs, eg Class Teacher or Designated Teacher;
- Representative from Virtual School Team;
- Any therapeutic service actively involved with the child or carers;
- Police, where issues indicate this;
- Advocate.

1.9 Other attendees may include the Designated Nurse for Children in Care or any other professionals that are involved in work with the child or young person or if there is a likelihood that a referral will be made. Wherever there are concerns that a young person may be at risk of offending or it is known that they have been involved in offending, a representative from the Youth Offending Service should be included. In some circumstances, it might be appropriate to invite the birth parent(s) if it is felt they have a positive contribution to make. The views of the birth parents should always be fed into the meetings.

1.10 Commissioning should be involved through consultation whenever a child is placed in commissioned placements.

2. Attendance of Child or Young Person

2.1 The principle is always that children and young people should be involved and included in decisions that are made about them as much as possible. However, we also accept that children and young people sometimes find participation in meetings difficult. Children in Care tell us that they are particularly sensitive to the fact that lots of different

people know private and personal things about them. For this reason There are times when all parents have discussions and make decisions about their children without including or involving them directly.

- 2.2 In family situations, good parents would endeavour to seek the views of the children in the family and give weight to those views. Once decisions have been made, a good parent would ensure that children were told as quickly as possible what has been decided and would be able to explain how the child's views had informed the decision making process. Children and young people should usually be given a choice about attending Placement Stability Meetings but there may be some circumstances where this is not appropriate or in the child's best interests. Any conscious decision not to include the young person should be recorded, with an explanation of the reason.
- 2.3 An Interpreter must be provided if the young person does not understand English as a first language. Symbols should be used for disabled children and can be used for many children to assist in understanding.
- 2.4 Careful consideration should be given to children and young people with SEN/learning, language or physical disabilities in relation to involvement and also the way in which the meeting operates. The Chairperson must allow for participation of the child or young person, which is at their speed and level of understanding. Cultural differences, particularly around gender, which may inhibit participation should be assessed and addressed.

3. Implementation of the Meeting

- 3.1 Placement Stability Meetings should **always** be instigated in the following circumstances:-
 - As soon as it is known or suspected that a placement has become fragile or unstable – it does not matter where the intelligence has come from as all sources are equally valid. It might be the supervising social worker, support worker or teacher;
 - If there are particular difficulties in containing a child in a school or other educational facility;
 - Where a placement is planned and it is predicted that it will face particular difficulties because of a child's challenging behaviour or special emotional/mental health needs;
 - In such cases where black and minority ethnic children are in trans-cultural placements and their needs are quite specific and the placements may require additional guidance and support;
 - Children and young people at risk of CSE;

- Children and young people at risk of criminal exploitation (gangs/County Lines)
- When children or young people have gone missing
- Young people involved in the Criminal Justice system;
- Young people on two or more unplanned placements;
- Other situations may be considered in line with professional judgement and consultation with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

4. Chairing Meetings

- 4.1 The Placement Stability meetings for in House placements should be chaired by the Fostering Team Manager, Practice Manager or sufficiently experienced Advanced Practitioner.
- 4.2 The Placement Stability meetings for in commissioned placements or residential should be chaired by the Childcare Team Manager, Practice Manager or sufficiently experienced Advanced Practitioner

5. Preparation for Meetings

- 5.1 The Child's Social Workers should attend the first Placement Stability Meeting with the child or young person's Care Plan (or Pathway Plan, as appropriate). This plan will consist of the detail of all the child's identified needs, which aspects of those needs should be addressed and a description of the outcomes to be achieved. Where CSE or Criminal Exploitation is suspected there should be a Safety Plan in place which must be updated as appropriate.
- 5.2 The purpose of the Placement Stability meeting is to consider the Care Plan and agree actions that will ensure any additional provision required to stabilise the placement is made within appropriate timescales.
- 5.3 The actions from the Placement Stability meeting should be recorded in case notes following these headings:-
 - Attendance;
 - Issues and concerns;
 - Analysis of information;
 - Actions;
 - Fostering Team management agreement for any addition support package, if in house placement.
 - Referral to ART for support package, if a commissioned placement.

6. Timing of Meetings

- 6.1 Meetings should be held as often as is necessary to ensure that the actions are successfully implemented, monitored and reviewed. It may be that following the initially meeting, a smaller group of professionals continue to meet at a regular agreed basis. Meetings should continue to be held until the crisis has passed, the placement has stabilised or the areas of difficulty have been addressed. This may mean that meetings are held weekly or fortnightly to begin with; gradually reducing in frequency until a decision is made that they are no longer necessary. The needs of each individual situation will determine the frequency of meetings.

7. Reviews

- 7.1 The most recent Placement Stability Meeting action record, along with an updated Care Plan, should be submitted to the Reviewing Officer at each statutory review. Reviewing Officers should routinely enquire about the use of Placement Stability meetings in any given situation and may recommend that they are instigated. Outside the review process, decisions to terminate Placement Stability meetings can only be taken by a Team Manager.