**Legal Tracking Meeting: Terms of Reference**

*Version Control*

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| Date | Details | Updated by |
| 01/11/2022 | Implementation |  |
| 01/02/2021 | Annual Review | Shaun Evans and Helena Svedang |
| 09/02/2023 | Annual Review | Karen Ogle, Louisa Jones and Helena Svedang |
| 30/05/2023 | Amendment to Core Membership | Louisa Jones |

**Purpose/role of the Legal Tracking Meeting**

The Legal Tracking Meeting will sit within the scope of the Learning Academy; its ultimately function and purpose is to provide strategic oversight of all planning pre-proceedings, proceedings and private proceedings, with the aim of reducing drift and delay and ensuring that children achieve the right plan of permanence in the most timely way.

The Legal Tracking Meeting will lead to the production of a weekly legal overview, provided in written format to all relevant Team Managers, Service Managers and legal officers, to ensure joint oversight of any issue which may impact on the legal planning for a child. This includes but is not limited to any key staffing issues and plans of mitigation, key Court hearings and any changes to attendance, key filing dates and identification of any potential delay and plans to address this, oversight of those children subject to private proceedings and critical midpoint and final reviews of those children subject to pre-proceedings.

**Aims and responsibilities**

* To track and monitor the timely progress of actions and work identified through the Legal Gateway Panel process.
* To identify, challenge and support practice, to achieve the most appropriate and timely outcomes for children.
* To ensure timely and proportionate decisions are made in respect of any identified need for extension to the twelve week timescale for those children in pre-proceedings.
* To ensure oversight of the practice leading to the issuing of public law proceedings and that this is in line with the requirements of the Public Law Outline (2014, as updated).
* To ensure that improving outcomes for children remains at the centre of any decisions in relation to PLO and all alternatives have been considered.
* To gather appropriate information to inform sufficiency planning.
* To ensure that outcomes are as positive as they can be for children.

**Membership**

*Core*

Head of Service of Quality Assurance – Chair (Head of Service of MASH, Front Door and Operational acting as deputy Chair)

Court QA Manager

Head of Service, MASH, Front Door and Operational

Service Manager, Operational

Head of Service, Regulated Services

Service Manager, Regulated Services

Legal Gateway Panel administrator – minute taker

*If required*

Team Manager and Social Worker for the child/children

Legal solicitor with conduct

Family Group Conference Manager

Others as identified

**Membership**

A review of the Terms of Reference for the Legal Tracking Meeting is to be undertaken annually.

**Working Methods**

* The meeting will be held every week, normally on a Monday morning from 9am-10am.
* The agenda will follow the structure of the Legal Overview, with specific agenda items in relation to any child/ren who are subject to pre-proceedings, and a midpoint or final decision is required.
* The Court QA Manager will take responsibility for the creation of the Legal Overview following every Legal Tracking Meeting; this will be sent to all relevant Team Managers, Service Managers and legal officers.
* Actions and decisions will be recorded by the Panel administrator who will add the actions and decisions to child/ young person’s LCS file and a Legal Case Note. The Panel administrator will then upload all supporting documents and referral to child’s LCS file in documents within one working day.

**Specific Guidance for Pre-Proceedings Midpoint Reviews and Final Pre-Proceedings Reviews**

*Pre-Proceedings Midpoint Review (at 6 weeks)*

Midpoint Reviews will take place as part of the core Legal Tracking Meeting, at the six week point of the pre-proceedings process.

Where the midpoint review identifies an extension to 12-week timescale may be required, this will only be agreed by the Divisional Director of Safeguarding. Any extension request will need to evidence ‘exceptional’ circumstances and can only be agreed up to a maximum of 16 weeks.

Where there is drift and delay and or actions not being progressed, the mid-point review will seek to resolve these, with clear direction from the Chair and the relevant Head of Service in terms of the actions required.

Where agreement is needed for additional resources not previously agreed (for example other expert assessment or services such as hair strand testing), the social work team will make a request to ATR/their Service Manager/Head Of Service in line with delegated financial authority.

Where we are unable to engage with families within the pre-proceedings process to ensure children are safe and not at risk of significant harm, the membership of the Legal Tracking Meeting will review the plan and threshold and seek an urgent return to Legal Gateway Panel.

*Final PLO review at 12 weeks (and 16 weeks in exceptional circumstances if agreed extension)*

Final PLO Reviews will take place as part of the core Legal Tracking Meeting, at the twelve week point of the pre-proceedings process (or 16 weeks in exceptional circumstances).

The Final PLO review record will be saved to a Legal Case Note on the child’s LCS file by the Legal Gateway Panel administrator.

In making this decision, the Legal Tracking Meeting will consider updates and progress of actions and identified, outcomes, the impact for the children of the PLO process and any identified reduction of risk, any continuing needs, enduring risks, protective factors (and or issues of drift/delay with proposals for addressing these if seeking an extension to 16 weeks).

The decision in respect of stepping out of PLO process to a CP/CIN plan or step up to initiate Legal Proceedings (or extend to 16 weeks PLO process if necessary) will be the decision of the Chair.