

# **Children's Safeguarding and Early Help Services**

## **Permanence Policy, Procedure & Guidance**

# Permanence Policy, Procedure & Guidance for Children's Safeguarding and Early Help Services

Title	Name of Policy
<b>Purpose/scope</b>	<p>The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations sets out the clear expectation that Local Authorities should, wherever necessary, secure permanent care arrangements for children in their care. This has been strengthened in the revised regulations regarding achieving permanence from the day a child becomes looked after (Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010).</p> <p>This Permanence Strategy Policy, procedure and guidance document, is underpinned by our service standards, values and principles. These are integral to achieving permanency for our children and young people on the edge of care or in care.</p>
<b>Subject key words</b>	Promoting and protecting; secure; permanent; standards; values; principles; risk; partnership; respect; SMART; assessment; plans; review.
<b>Council Priority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put our children and young people first.</li> <li>• Protect and support our vulnerable children and adults.</li> </ul>
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## 1.0 Introduction

Our approach to permanency will involve the interplay between what is in the best interest for the child/ren or young person and the desired objective to support the safety of our children and young people in the most appropriate care provision that will meet their needs.

### 1.1 Consultation with children and young people, their families and carers

It is crucial in all cases, that the children and young people's Social Workers meet with the child/young person (where appropriate) and parents/family/carers in order to formulate a proposed plan for permanency, for presentation to the Permanency Panel. This will take place by way of a planning meeting which should be chaired by the Team Manager of the Social Worker responsible for the child or young person.

### 1.2 Public Law outline, Legal Planning Meetings, Children In Care 2<sup>nd</sup> Reviews & Permanency Panel

- It is expected that in every legal planning meeting, the Chair (Assistant Director, Service Manager or Group Manager) will consider how permanency can be achieved for the child/ren or young person concerned. The potential options for permanency should be explored, particularly where the evidence indicates an unlikely return home to birth family.
- Legal proceedings: once the decision has been made that the child/ren or young person needs to become looked after by the local authority, the permanency planning options should be considered.
- A plan for permanency must be developed prior to the children/young person's second review, where appropriate by the Independent Reviewing Officer; it is most likely at this stage that the plan will be parallel or triple planning.
- Where Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, Placement with Family or Connected Persons, or Long Term Fostering are being considered, referrals must be made promptly to the respective service areas to enable them to allocate and make their respective contributions.

- Final plans for permanence must be submitted to the Permanency Panel for consideration: recommendations and approval in particular for long term fostering (internal and external), special guardianship orders, child arrangement orders, placement with parents and family.

### 1.3 **Children looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989**

- When a child or young person becomes looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, a plan for permanency must be made prior to the second review and be ratified by the IRO at that statutory review.
- Prior to this the Team Manager and Social Worker for the child or young person must consider the permanency options and agree timescales in which to explore and develop a final plan for permanency to be ratified at the second statutory review.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers – Legal advice to be obtained and liaison with the Regional Immigration Office, and where appropriate convene legal planning meetings to discuss achieving permanency for individual children or young people, who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.

### 1.4 **Assessments**

Robust Child & Family Assessments and targeted assessments will inform decision making as to whether it is necessary to invoke legal proceedings where the options to promote safety and manage risks are limited and compromise the child/ren & young person's current and future welfare. The availability and suitability of other family or friends able to provide care and support long term if current and future care by birth parents will compromise the child/ren or young person's safety and wellbeing. This interplay may become complex to reduce delay in care planning for children and young people, through the exploration of a number of options for permanency concurrently and may also involve decisions as to whether to maintain siblings together or to consider separation to meet their individual needs.

### 1.5 **Reassessment of Needs for children and young people whose needs or circumstances change over time**

For children and young people in care where their initial care plans have changed, it is important to revisit whether previous initial options for permanency remain unsuitable or

whether they should be explored again as those options have changed over time. It may be that initial identified safety and risks have significantly reduced over time with birth parents or within the wider family. It may be that the child/ young person's individual needs have changed enabling the child/young person to return to their family /wider family and or to be placed alongside siblings which they may have been separated from.

## 1.6 Decision making and the exploration of permanency options

- Team Managers and Social Workers will develop clear plans with timescales in which to undertake child and family assessments to inform further assessments and subsequent, the service provision required to achieve permanency option/s to meet the specific need for the child/ren or young person.
- Where there is a need to further explore the ability of the immediate birth family or other extended family or friends options to support the needs of the child/ren or young person/s the Team Manager/Social Worker will refer to Family Solutions Team to convene a family group conference discussion to assist in establishing whether the family or other family members are able to provide support to overt the need for formal interventions or to explore who may be the preferred option.
- The Brokerage, Fostering Family Finding and Targeted Services Teams to explore potential permanency options with long term fostering.
- Referral for Adoption may be a concurrent option for some children and young people and is the ultimate permanency option for many younger children, informed by the outcome of the Child and Family Assessment, specific assessments and the outcome of assessment routes within Family Solutions and the Assessment and Permanency Team (Family and Friends Fostering)
- Where there are specific younger children and most certainly for older children and young people who require permanency the option of Child Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders will require consideration as an alternative to care or as an objective of the care planning to achieve permanency and will need to be actively planned for, documented within care proceedings, regularly reviewed in care planning and in particular Children in Care reviews to reduce children and young people remaining indefinitely without permanency within family and friends and mainstream approved foster placements.

- Where decisions are taken for a child/ren or young person to return to their birth parents reassessment of the birth parents capacity to provide a safe and caring environment to support the child/ren or young person needs will be required followed by an updated children and Families assessment and planned period of Placement with Parents Assessment and Support Plan with defined objectives to be met and timescales for the child/ren or young person to return to their birth family.
- How to appraise different options for permanence- See [Permanency Forms Templates Section - Document 1](#) which is an optional tool for Social Workers and their managers to use following Children and Family Assessments in determining the most appropriate options to achieve permanency with a link to permanency planning considerations for use by children and young people's Social Workers and Team Managers to appraise different permanency options.

## 2.0 **Supporting Permanence - Placement stability and meeting additional needs**

Permanence in long-term foster care where the Permanence Plan for the child is long-term foster care this may be where the current short-term placement is assessed to meet the long term needs of the child for permanence or where a new placement is identified for the child as a result of an assessment and matching process.

It is important to think about the needs of older children and young people in relation to achieving permanence in their lives. Older children and young people quite often favour being cared for by a family or friend carer than to be cared for by a Foster Carer whom they have not had a prior relationship with. The care planning process must identify adults such as wider family and friends or other connected people who can provide emotional support and a long term trusting relationship which will provide continuing support, particularly during periods of transition. Good quality work with families can help the young person build bridges back to his/her parents or other family members who may be able to provide that support even though it is not possible for the young person to live at home. Our Family Solutions and Family Group Conferencing Services will be able to support Social Workers and managers to enable children and particularly older young people where the plans are that the child and young person are not to return to their immediate birth family.

## 2.1 Placement Stability & Placement Stability Panel

- For all looked after children, it is a legal requirement to have an up-to-date Care Plan. The minimum statutory requirements for the review of the Care Plan for looked after children are set down in the Care Planning Regulations. The first looked after review should take place within **20 working days of the child coming into care**. The child's second review should take place no later than three months after the first. Reviews are then held at intervals of no more than six months for as long as the child remains looked after.
- The [Care Planning Regulations 2010](#) and the [Children Act 2004](#) require there to be a written Permanence Plan presented to the second statutory review (i.e. within four months of becoming looked after). The Permanence Plan will identify the appropriate option (or options depending upon the stage reached in any care proceedings) for the child (see page 5, Options for Permanence) and will be formally endorsed at this second statutory review. Responsibilities for implementing the plan and actions contained within it will be clearly attributed with clear timescales for outcomes. Prior to the second review, the case should be an agenda item on the Permanence Panel to challenge and support the proposed Permanence Plan and ensure that there are clear recommendations for discussion at the second review.
- The plan will include evidence of contingency arrangements. The plan will be made available, and updated, at each subsequent review. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will be informed by the Social Worker of any changes to the Care Plan and any significant events in the child's life between reviews. Particular attention to permanency planning will need to be paid at the first and second review to children accommodated under [Section 20 of the Children Act 1989](#) given that the local authority will not hold parental responsibility. In these circumstances legal advice should be considered prior to the second review.
- Telford & Wrekin Council's assessment process sets out the clear arrangements for how cases will be managed once a child is referred into Telford & Wrekin's Children's Safeguarding and Specialist Services. All children for whom a Children's Social Care Services Referral is accepted will be subject to a Child and Family Assessment, proportionate to their assessed needs. The assessment should be holistic and information gathered from a range of sources including, up to date chronologies, relevant

historical assessments, key professionals/agencies and any other person involved with the child.

- A Child and Family Assessment should be undertaken, both when it is identified that the child is referred to Safeguarding Services, and at other points throughout involvement
- Sibling Assessments – “together or apart” may be required for sibling groups, where it has been identified that being placed together is not in the children’s best interests. This should always be the exception.

### 3.0 Placement Stability Panel

The Placement Stability Panel is a forum with a holistic approach to support decision making where additional resources may be required to maintain placements as well as unblocking any potential partner agency contributions which may contribute to placement instability. Disruption meetings will be held should placement breakdowns occur and learning from these will be considered within the quality assurance mechanism.

- The support needs of children and young people who require additional support to achieve permanence should be identified early and where there is need for additional support and resources, referral made to placement stability prior to completion of the permanency option being considered and a Support Plan developed and regularly reviewed to assess continuation, reduction or cessation.
- Where additional resources are required to meet the Placement Support Plan which Social Workers and their managers have not been able to secure through discussion with partners or where authorisation is required for additional resource than specified within the placement, Social Workers will need to consider whether a referral to Placement Stability and Resource Allocation Panels.
- Terms of Reference and guidance for Placement Stability Panel & Guidance [\\_See section on Panels which support Permanency](#)

Where the child/young person resource and or funding requirements/carers fees are outside of the normal placement cost to meet placement stability and achieve permanence referrals must be made to the Resources and Allocations meeting which meets weekly on Thursday afternoons 2:00pm – 5:00pm. For further information please

see section: [Panels which support Placement stability for guidance on the operation and referral process for various Panels](#)

- [Terms of Reference and guidance for Resources Allocation Panel & Guidance](#)
- [Terms of Reference for Fostering Panel-](#)
- [Terms of Reference for Joint Adoption Panel](#)

Children will be formally considered at the **Permanence Panel** (See **Permanence Flow Chart, Permanence Panel Terms of Reference and Resources Allocation Panel** prior to the second review and in situations where the care plan changes. In all cases, the child, their carer's, the birth family and the Local Authority will share an expectation about the permanence of the situation, and provide a commitment to support and maintain an enduring, nurturing and caring home environment

#### 4.0 **Parallel planning (multi-track planning)**

Multi-track planning in this context refers to a situation where two or more plans run in parallel. In such cases the main focus will be upon rehabilitation at home but, at the same time, a parallel plan or plans (e.g. placement with family/friends and/or adoption) will be established in order to achieve an alternative permanent placement if rehabilitation is unsuccessful.

Multi-track planning does not pre-empt the court decision but does prevent delay when reunification is not feasible. Where parallel planning has been identified a referral to the Joint Adoption Service should be made at an early stage.

Birth parents will always be informed from the outset that two or more options are under consideration within a strictly controlled timescale and that the primacy of the rehabilitation plan must also be stressed. Only in exceptional circumstances would it not be appropriate to formulate multi-track plans for children.

## 5.0 Adoption

Where the plan for the child is adoption there will be robust evidence addressing all realistic options for securing permanence and security for the child via other options. The evidence will contain an analysis of the arguments for and against all of these options along with a fully reasoned recommendation. Before deciding to grant an Adoption Order the court must be satisfied that adoption is the best option available to secure the long-term welfare of the child.

## 6.0 Children placed with birth parents

Where a looked after child is placed with a birth parent under [Part IV of the Children Act 1989](#) every effort should be made to secure legal permanence though a clear exit plan which supports the discharge of the Care Order within a given timescale (Minimum of 12 months). In some cases, a supervision order may be appropriate. In a small minority of cases, it may be appropriate to retain a Care Order in respect of a child placed with parents for longer than 12 months due to episodic lapses (e.g. recurring mental health issues or alcohol related relapses). This will mean that parental responsibility for the child will continue to be shared.

## 7.0 Family and Friends and Connected Persons

Family and friends care will often provide an important alternative route to permanence for a child, particularly where this can be supported by a Child Arrangement Order (previously a Residence Order), a Special Guardianship Order or through adoption. Our policies and practice will be guided by the principle that support should be based on the needs of the child rather than focusing on the child's legal status. All support should seek to ensure that family and friends carers (whether or not they are approved foster carers) are provided with the right assistance to ensure that children do not become or remain looked after by the local authority for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Where children or a young person requires a long term fostering placement following:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Child in Care Review
- Decision made to revoke the placement order for adoption
- Failure of a family or friends carer to become an approved foster carer
- Registration or de registration of an approved foster carer

A referral to the Family Finding and Targeted Services Team will be made to find a match to a suitable long term foster placement.

Child/ren or young people with specific additional needs.

Where specific reasons or circumstances result in permanence options changing for children and young people with specific and or additional needs:

- (Sibling groups separate) we would seek to reassess whether sibling(s) should remain apart or be together prior to making a referral to the family finding and targeted services team.
- We would re-visit whether the parents' circumstances have changed and provide a suitable alternative to a long term foster placement.
- We would re-visit whether any family or friends who were previously unable to provide support, and the child/ren or young person has maintained a strong and meaningful relationship which can sustain the child/ren or young person's needs is a suitable alternative before making a referral to the Family Finding and Targeted Services Team.

The placement of a child on a temporary basis with family, friends and connected persons does not imply this is a suitable permanence solution. When we place children on a temporary basis we must be satisfied that this option is the most suitable means to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and that the circumstances are such that the arrangement cannot wait until the full fostering approval process carefully considering the long term implications for permanence must be undertaken. Where there is reasonable doubt from the onset that the proposed carer will not be able to meet the expectations required to meet approval under the Fostering Regulations, preference will be given to an existing approved carer whilst the assessment of suitability is undertaken. Plans should seek to actively discourage families 'placing' children for extended periods without consideration of these options for legal security.

Where the Fostering Service has undertaken a Family Assessment and recommended approval to the Fostering Panel, and if successfully recommended for approval subject to the agreeing decision makers confirmation, the optimum plan will be for the family's or friends carer to transfer to (SGO) Special Guardianship Order

## 8.0 Long Term Fostering & Staying Put

There may be some older looked after children who are settled and placed with long-term foster carers who, for whatever reason, are reluctant to pursue legal permanence for the child/children through special guardianship or adoption. In such cases, so long as such a plan is agreed as being in the child's best interests, such arrangements should be supported to achieve stability. However, the possibility of securing legal permanence in the future must be kept under review.

Early and active consideration should be given to young people remaining with their foster carer's post 18 in respect of Staying Put arrangements. Staying Put arrangements are led by the Leaving Care Service. For guidance in relation to policies and procedures speak to the Leaving Care Service.

For a small minority of looked after children, placement within a small Children's Home or Specialist Educational Setting will be the appropriate setting to ensure that their needs are best met. For some older children these settings provide the right environment to meet their needs through into adulthood. In other circumstances this will be a time limited arrangement to address specific needs and issues at a particular point in a child's life. The arrangements for every child living in these settings will be kept under careful review through the care planning and review process.

## 9.0 Private Fostering – (Children not looked after)

Where children and young people are not looked after and have remained in a private fostering arrangement for more than nine months, the Local Authority will facilitate a Family Solutions Discussion between the child/young person's parents, with the private foster carers agreeing permanence options for the child/young persons. This will be confirmed by an updated children's and family's assessment of the child/young persons and a team assessment of the private fostering assessment.

## 10.0 Achieving Permanence different Permanence options – pathways and processes

See accompanying permanence flow charts for the different pathways and processes to achieve permanence for individual children and young people.

### Panels which support the achievement of Permanence

1. Placement Stability Panel
2. Permanence Panel
3. Resources Allocation Panel
4. Fostering Panel
5. Joint Adoption Panel
6. Tracking Meeting for Permanence

### Key documents to support specific permanency options

- **Permanency Planning Consideration Tool-** for use by case managers and Team Managers to explore Permanency options following completion of C&F Assessment
- **Child's Permanency Record** – completion by child's / young person's social worker (see Protocol)
- **Brokerage Referral to for Family Finding (for internal fostering and external fostering)** (see Protocol)
- **Referral Assessment & Permanency Team - Assessment forms for Temporary Approval, Viability Assessment and Form C assessment. Special Guardianship assessments**
- **Referral for Adoption and relevant Assessment and Matching forms**
- **Long Term Match Form (Fostering)** - for completion by case manager and fostering service provider
- **Form F update form for Long Term Match** - For completion by fostering service provider
- **Long Term Match (Fostering) - Support plan** - For completion by child/young person's Social Worker and the Fostering service
- **Delegated Authority Form** - For completion by Fostering Social Worker and child/young person's Social Worker and will require further consultation with the child young person parent.