

Permanence Panel Protocol and Terms of Reference



Children, Young People and Learning

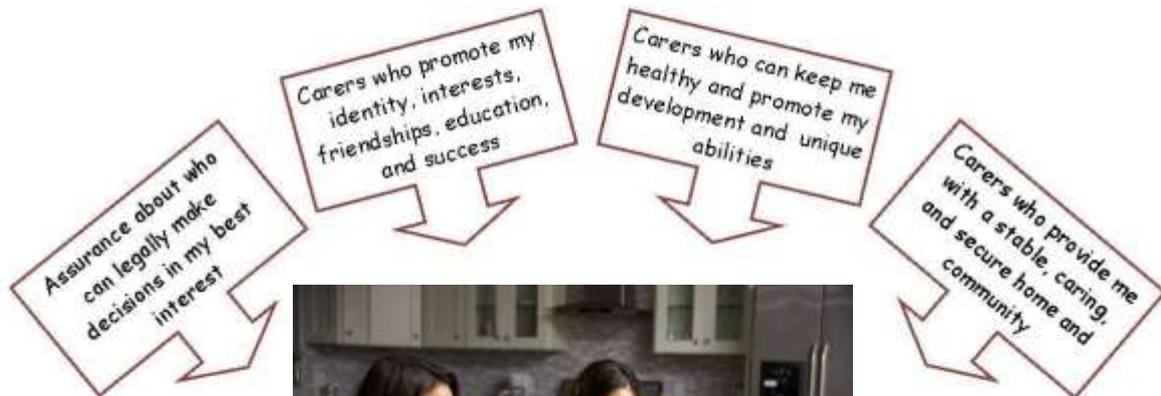
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Achieving Permanence for Children

What do I need?



To return home to live with my parents or carers

To live with another family member or friend

To live with foster carers

To live with a new adoptive family

To live in a residential care home

To have the opportunity to stay with my foster family after I turn 18.

What's the right plan for me?

Permanence Panel Referral and Decision-Making Flowchart

Reasons for referring – why you go to Permanence Planning Meeting	Decisions that Permanence Panel make
Where reunification of a child back to their parents or carers is being considered.	Referral for Agency Decision Maker decision and refer to RAA to begin family finding.
Within 28 days of any child being placed in a residential placement.	
Before the second looked after review meeting of any child who recently started or moved placement, or where there is risk of disruption.	Refer to legal planning meeting to change a child’s legal status or Order.
All children where adoption may be an option.	To endorse a reunification plan for a child to return their original parents or carers.
All children by week 10 of the Public law Outline process to consider latest care plan.	A care planning review meeting with involved professionals and family to review recommended outcomes of the panel for the Child’s care plan.
An Independent Reviewing Officer where there is concern for drift and delay in achieving a child’s permanence.	
A manager can refer any case where there are questions or concerns about how robust a child’s permanence plan is.	
Resource panel can refer any child who has recently become looked after and a return home is unlikely in the near future.	A referral is made to resource panel to secure funding to support a child’s long-term living arrangements.
Return to panel to review progress of a permanence plan later.	

Purpose of Protocol

West Sussex Children’s Services believes that all our children and young people should live with carers who love, support, care for and respect them and who will do so through their childhood into adolescence and adulthood.

Guidance published by the DfE (2014) defines permanence as:

“The framework of emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence (the carer has parental responsibility for the child) which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. The objective of permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families; from family support through to adoption. This can include situations where the Local authority and birth parents share parental responsibility (PR) but where the carer has made a long-term commitment to the child”.

Similarly, the Care Inquiry In 2013 found that permanence for children means:

“Security, stability, love and a strong sense of identity and belonging” They found that this was not necessarily connected to legal status and that no one route to permanence was better than another. The Council supports permanence through a range of options including a return to birth parents or placement with extended family or friends. Where this is not appropriate or possible, we seek suitable permanent, family-based placements through foster to adopt, adoption, special guardianship or long-term fostering. Where necessary some older young people will find permanence and security through good residential care and we recognise that some young people will thrive, achieve and make a positive transition to adulthood through this provision.

Using our Relationship Based Practice Framework, we always try to secure a permanent future with either the birth family or the wider family network. To do so we are committed to using Family Network Meetings with families when children become looked after and supporting families to utilise their own strengths and resources to develop effective safety plans so that children can return home as soon as it is practicable for them to do so. We recognise that this is not always possible or may not be achievable within the child’s timeframe and as such we will seek suitable alternatives wherever necessary, working with the family and young person to effect permanence in a child centred, fair and transparent manner.

We know that every child or young person is different and so each must have their own permanence plan agreed by the time of their second looked after review, including those young people for whom residential care is the most appropriate option. Children and young people who arrive in the country and meet the status of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) will be subject to permanence planning in the same way as all other looked after children. The need to focus on permanency planning is paramount where a child’s legal status remains undetermined and the decision to remain in the UK is outstanding.

Whatever the plan that is agreed the seven **Corporate Parenting principles of the Children and Social Work Act 2017** will apply.

These are:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and young people,
2. To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes, and feelings,
3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people,
4. To help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners,

5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people,
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships, and education or work,
7. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

This protocol clarifies how we will support permanence for all the children we work with, where this is being sought away from birth family or friends. It further specifies the decision-making process where required.

This protocol must be read in conjunction with the following policy areas on Tri-ex

1. Section – Looked After Children
2. Section – Fostering and Adoption

Purpose of Permanence Panel

The purpose of the permanence panel is to:

- a) Help West Sussex County Council carry out its corporate parenting responsibilities to children in its care within the spirit and meaning of the seven principles outlined in the Children and Social Work Act (2017)
- b) Support the implementation of timely and positive long term, stable care plans and placements for all children in care based on their individual assessed needs
- c) Ensure that West Sussex County Council is ambitious in seeking legal permanence for all children and that adoption is pursued for all children, regardless of their age, unless there is clear evidence to suggest that this is not in the child's best interest
- d) Avoid drift and delay when securing long term permanent placements for children with the most suitable carer. This can include foster to adopt, adoption, connected persons, special guardians, foster carers, and residential placement
- e) Agree residential placements as permanent living arrangements where there is an up to date assessment and care plan indicating this is in a young person's best interests and will allow them to flourish. Young people should be encouraged to let panel know their views about the placement. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must agree with the plan for long term care in a residential unit.) These cases must be placed before permanence panel within 28 days of the placement commencing for review and monitoring. Such a change of plan will be formally recorded on Mosaic
- f) Review any child or young person referred to it by the allocated IRO or any other interested professional if they are concerned that suitable permanence options are not being robustly explored for a child or young person
- g) Refer children or young people and set timescales of when permanence plan review meetings should take place for them
- h) Consider those care plans where the plan is a change away from adoption and make recommendations before the change is considered at adoption panel
- i) Consider sibling together/apart assessments and agree plans for separation of siblings following a review of all the relevant assessments and care plans
- j) Ensure that the presenting practitioner and team have always explored how we can work in partnership with the family network to secure permanence for children within their family and

their wider community. This will include reviewing whether family network meetings have been utilised and whether any of the other reunification processes available have been sourced.

Quorate for the panel will be the chair and at least two additional panel members. Panel members should not exceed eight for any given meeting.

Panel members must declare any involvement or pre-existing knowledge of a case being presented in the meeting.

The Permanence Panel will review children in the following circumstances:

- a) Legal Gateway panel (LGP) will refer all cases where care proceedings have been initiated and adoption may be an outcome
- b) A permanence planning meeting will be convened for all children and young people who become looked after within 4 weeks. The panel chair will then refer all children to the permanence panel to ensure there is robust planning activity for all children looked after
- c) Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) can refer children where they believe there has been drift in the decision making and permanency planning processes for a child or young person. Where this happens the IRO is expected to complete the referral to panel in conjunction with the allocated social worker, detailing why they have referred the child and where they believe there has been drift and delay
- d) Before the second looked after child review meeting of any child who has recently begun or changed living arrangements
- e) Where there is a likelihood of a placement breakdown or disruption
- f) Any child who is subject of care proceedings, by week 10 the panel must review their latest care plan
- g) plan
- h) Any manager can request that the panel undertake a review of a child's permanence planning to assure themselves that this planning is robust, timely and in the child's best interest
- i) Access to Resources (currently CLAM) panel can refer to Permanence Panel any child or young person where they have recently become looked after and a return home is not believed to be possible or viable in the near future
- j) When considering the reunification of a child back to their parents or carers

Referral Process for Panel

Any child or young person who meets the criteria can be referred to permanence panel. Referrals will be made using the form contained in Appendix A and can be accessed under forms on Mosaic

All referrals must be completed and submitted to the panel administrator at least three working days before the panel date. Any late submissions or those submitted incorrectly may be deferred to another panel date in order to be properly submitted and considered.

Panel members are expected to read all referrals and come to panel prepared with questions and comments.

Referrals should be succinct and contain just enough information for the panel to understand the significant events in a child or young person's life and to inform discussions and key recommendations. It should not unnecessarily cut and paste complete reports or previous information on file. Additional reports should not be submitted along with a referral form unless the chair gives agreement.

Referrals must equally justify the recommendations or decisions being sought by the panel and set out why this is believed to be in the child or young person's best interest. It must also justify the anticipated cost implications, both short and long term.

The chair will decide which cases are properly prepared or are given priority to be heard at any given panel.

Panel Process and Agenda

The panel will be chaired by a Children's Social Care Service Lead. The chair is responsible for facilitating discussions in a timely, respectful and focused manner using the agenda set out in section below. Given the importance of securing permanence for children, only a Service Lead can chair the panel. The Service Lead for Children Looked After and Permanence is the substantive chair and Service Lead for Safeguarding Quality and Practice Quality Assurance/or their representative is vice chair. In the event neither is available, the Group Manager for Permanence should discuss with the Assistant Director whether the panel should go ahead.

The panel will meet every fortnight and its members will include:

- a) Service Lead - Chair
- b) Adoption (Permanence) Group Manager
- c) Family Support & Protection Group Manager
- d) IRO Manager or representative
- e) Representative from Fostering- Family Finding
- f) Practice Manager
- g) Minute Taker

Legal representative – written summary

Other relevant professionals by invitation of the chair

The agenda for the panel will be as follows:

1. Purpose of panel
2. Statement of conduct and confidentiality
3. Introductions
4. Review of previous recommendations and decisions
5. Case presentations (should be a maximum of five per panel)
6. Review of panel recommendations and decisions
7. Any other business
8. Next date and adjournment

The agenda for case presentations will be as follows:

1. Social Worker or Practice Manager gives brief case summary and what they are seeking from panel (5 mins max)
2. Chair opens discussion from panel members (10-15 mins max)
3. Chair summarises discussion and recommendations or decisions made (5 mins max)

For panel to proceed in a timely and focused manner it requires panel members to come prepared having read all referrals prior. It also requires Social Workers and Practice Managers to complete referrals properly, in time, and presented in a succinct and focused way.

The statement of conduct and confidentiality reads:

The panel will proceed in a respectful manner. This means language or actions that are offensive or discriminatory are not tolerated. Please turn your phones to silent and excuse yourself if you need to take an urgent call. The panel and its chair aim for the meeting to provide constructive feedback and considered recommendations.

Information shared is confidential and is not to be discussed outside this meeting without proper consent or purpose to do so. Panel reports must be confidentially shredded and minutes from the meeting securely stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Panel members are expected to support the chair in ensuring the meeting takes place in accordance with the agenda and statement of conduct and confidentiality.

The meeting will be coordinated and minuted by a business support administrator. All referrals to panel are to be emailed no later than three working days before to the meeting administrator.

Due to time constraints the chair may have to bring an end to discussions, prioritise which cases are heard at panel, and designate cases to be tabled for another panel meeting.

Outcomes and Decision Making

When reaching recommendations and decisions the chair should solicit the views of all panel members. Any panel member can request their view be recorded in the minutes.

The chair will normally concur with the majority view of the panel members in reaching panel recommendations and decisions. Where the chair makes recommendations or decisions against the view of the panel, the dissenting views will be recorded.

Where the panel has concerns about case planning and legal processes it can refer the case back to Service Lead/Group Manager and Permanency Coordinator for oversight and direction.

The panel can make the following recommendations and decisions:

- a) That a multi-agency care planning review meeting with the family takes place within 10 working days to review and revise the child's current care plan to consider or act upon recommendations or decisions made by the panel
- b) That a child is referred to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a decision on permanence

- c) That a referral be made to the Permanence Team to begin family finding for adoption cases.
- d) That the case proceeds to a legal planning meeting to consider changes to a child’s legal and/or care status
- e) That a referral is made to the Access to Resources Panel to secure funding in support of a child’s long-term placement plan
- f) That a full sibling “together/apart” assessment is completed and thereafter the children referred to panel
- g) That more work is undertaken to try and work with the family and their network to enable the child/young person to return home
- h) That a referral is made to the Pause programme for the child’s mother in order to support her in relation to future pregnancies that may result in another child being taken into care

The panel may decide and specify a date when a case must return to panel to consider changes and progress made on previous recommendations and decisions made.

The panel should reserve itself to making recommendations only; leaving responsibility for the detailed child’s planning for the involved family and professional network. Certain decisions may have to be taken where the chair believes the safeguarding of a child from significant harm or concerns of drift and delay warrants.

Where there is disagreement between panel members about the decisions made at panel or the case holding team have concerns about the decision made the Assistant Director should be asked to review the decisions made and where the point of concern is. The chair of panel must facilitate the discussion with the Assistant Director, ensuring that there is documentary evidence and relevant attendance at a meeting to review the area of disagreement. This meeting must be organised within 5 working days of the Permanence Panel wherein the permanence plan was heard. The Assistant Director will review the information presented and will agree the appropriate action to be taken on the permanence plan. This meeting will be minuted and the decision circulated to panel within 48 hours. A copy will be uploaded to the Mosaic file as usual.

The Permanency Coordinators will manage and oversee the permanency tracker to ensure that there is no drift or delay in case management.

Review / Contacts / References	
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