

Permanence Planning – Practice Guidance

Defining Permanence

Permanence is the term used to define the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. It aims to ensure a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that will give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging throughout their childhood into adult life.

Key Objectives in Permanence Planning

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. It is also important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives although they may not wish (for a variety of reasons) to be in a foster home or to be adopted.

When Does Permanence Planning Start?

Permanence Planning starts as soon as a child becomes looked after, whether they are accommodated under Section 20 or subject of a legal order. **All** looked after children must have a Permanence Plan, in order to prevent children from drifting in care and ensuring that they have the opportunity to maximise their full potential.

Developing a Permanence Plan is a staged process involving parallel planning, where several options are explored at the same time before a final decision can be made. (this process can also be known as twin or triple track planning)

The Permanence Plan should be developed by the child's second looked after review meeting. A single plan should be confirmed by the third looked after review meeting.

Options for Permanence

- Staying/Returning Home
- Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons
- Adoption
- Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters
- Special Guardianship
- Child Arrangements Orders
- Permanent Fostering
- Semi-independent Living
- Possible Residential placement for Child with Disability

Process for Permanence Planning

If a social worker is worried about the safety of a child/ children when living with their family or their main carer, the first step is to consult with their Practice Manager and Group Manager to determine whether the threshold has been met to make a referral to the Legal Gateway Panel Meeting

Assessment and Planning - Permanence in Practice

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 a child's care plan, which should be the overarching plan for the child. The key points in the child's journey are below and will apply until a final placement and legal permanence is achieved for a child; they could also be used at other key points in a child's life.

1. Presentation to Legal Gateway
2. Permanence Planning Meetings
3. 2nd Statutory Case review
4. Final Care Planning Meeting
5. Permanence Panel

It is the duty of West Sussex Children's Social Care to reunify children within the family wherever possible. All Edge of Care resources and family network meetings/ family group conferences 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 requires that assessments are completed at the earliest opportunity and in the majority of cases that will be during the Pre-Proceedings/Proceedings stages. There will be occasions where children are Looked After under S20 CA 1989 as an emergency or as the most appropriate way for them to be safeguarded.

1. Presentation to Legal Gateway

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 children to the Legal Gateway meeting 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 their case has been heard at the 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. A Primary Permanence Plan should be presented to Legal Gateway Panel when referring the child. This preparation can be done within the current referral form. Social Workers attending the Legal Gateway Panel should ensure that the following documentation has been completed:

- Genogram
- Chronology
- Referral Form (to include initial Permanence Plan)

- Most recent Child & Family Assessment

Please refer to Legal Gateway Policy / Guidance for more information.

The Gateway Panel will ratify the initial permanence plan and the actions will form the basis of the first Permanence Planning Meeting.

In addition to the documentation required for the Legal Gateway Panel, the action set and process in both scenarios will include the following:

- Family Network Meeting;
- A 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

2. Permanence Planning Meeting

The Initial Permanence Planning Meeting will take place within 7 working days of the Legal Gateway Panel decision that the threshold for a child entering Proceedings has been met.

In a minority of cases the Social Worker in consultation with their Manager may decide that the case should not be presented at the Legal Gateway meeting. For example; a 16/17-year-old where there has been a breakdown in family relations and there is a clear plan of reunification. In these circumstances the decision not to proceed to a Legal Gateway meeting must be ratified by a Service Lead. However, the Permanency Planning process should still be initiated.

Subsequent Permanence Planning Meetings will take place at least every 6 weeks They 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.

A permanence planning meeting is a professionals meeting to ensure:

- Timely planning takes place avoiding drift and delay;
- Contingency options are actively being pursued;
- Previous actions have been carried out;
- 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

The initial Permanency Planning meeting should be chaired by the Group Manager and all subsequent meetings chaired by the Practice Manager including the social worker and the most appropriate representative from Fostering and Adoption given the child's assessed and known needs. Other services with significant input such as the Virtual School should be invited as required. Consideration should be given to the child's emotional needs and whether a representative from CAMHS should attend.

A representative from the council's legal team can be invited for the first Permanence Planning meeting after the initial court hearing. This may 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 subsequent Permanence Planning meetings.

The child's Guardian should also be invited to subsequent permanence planning meetings 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. Foster carers should also be invited to all permanency planning meetings to ensure they are included in the formulation of the child's plan and work with other professionals to progress this, and particularly if permanent foster care is the primary permanence plan.

Where children are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, consideration will need to be given as to how Permanence will be achieved within the existing partnership arrangements with the child's parents as the current holders of Parental Responsibility, in line with Section 20 guidance. Cases involving children who have been accommodated in line with Section 20 guidance should be presented at the Access to Resource Panel (currently CLAM). Permanence planning meetings should take place where necessary to ensure there is no delay in finding homes for such children out of their family.

Children and young people who arrive in the country and meet the status of UASC will be subject to permanence planning in the same way as all other looked after children. The Permanency Plan will be agreed at the second CLA review, endorsed by the Independent Reviewing Officer and agreed in writing by the Service Lead. 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.

The Permanence Planning Meeting will produce a Permanence Plan (incorporated into the Care Plan) that is presented to the child's first, or at the latest the second, Children in Care Review. It is an expectation that the Permanence Plan includes one or more /parallel contingency plans. The social worker must ensure that the parents are informed of the reasons why more than one plan is being made to meet the child's needs and prevent unnecessary delay.

The Permanence Plan must be updated, following a Permanence Planning Meeting, where clarity is reached around which option is most likely for a child. This needs to be reflected in the Care Plan. If there is a significant change in the overall Care Plan, this must be communicated with the Independent Reviewing Officer and may trigger a Children Looked After Review.

3. 2nd Statutory Case Review

By the time of the 2nd Child's statutory Review at the latest, a child must have a Permanence Plan (incorporated into the Care Plan), which must be presented for consideration at the 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. It is good practice for a primary permanence plan to be presented at the child's first Statutory Case Review and we should aim for this to take place as often as possible.

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.

4. Final Care Planning Meeting

A Final care planning meeting should take place in all cases, where the Group Manager ratifies the plan for the child, before the Final Evidence is filed. Legal advice should be available. The IRO view must be given due consideration during the decision-making process. If the primary permanence plan is Adoption, this meeting must take place before the Should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA) panel hearing where needed and inform the Agency Decision Maker's decision to place the child for Adoption. A Final Care Planning meeting must set clear timescales to review the planning. For example, if Adoption has been identified as the best option for the child, but this cannot be realised, timescales must be set to review and robustly pursue secondary planning in the best interests. This decision must be taken no later than 16 weeks after care proceedings have commenced

5. Permanency Panel

The function of this panel is to:

- Ensure that children's permanence plans are progressed with the pace and urgency that is needed, including achieving legal or emotional security at the earliest point;
- To act as a Permanence Planning Meeting prior to the second Looked After Children Review so the identified plan/s can be ratified by the Independent Reviewing Officer;
- Ensure permanence plans are progressed without delay following the final order being obtained.

The purpose of these monthly meetings is to track every child in Pre-Proceedings, in Proceedings and those that are Looked After in their journey, to identify drift or delay, or barriers to meeting our Permanence objectives for every child.

The core members of the Tracking meeting will include:

- Service Lead– Chair
- Adoption Group Manager
- Family Support & Protection Group Manager
- Children Looked After Group Manager
- Representative from Fostering – Family Finder
- A Practice Manager
- IRO manager or representative

This Panel will consider the following:

- S20 accommodation agreed at the Legal Gateway Planning meeting is appropriate and with an agreed plan to remain looked after until 18
- Adoption is progressed
- Long term fostering matches are progressed
- SGO considered and Support Plans ratified
- Revocation of Care or Placement Order
- UASC – 16+.

Actions and decisions taken at the panel will be progressed by the relevant professionals and actively tracked and monitored by the permanence panel, including return dates to update the panel.

Review / Contacts / References	
Document title:	
Date approved:	6 April 2020
Approving body:	Policy, Practice and QA Steering Group
Last review date:	March 2020
Revision history:	
Next review date:	March 2021
Related internal policies, procedures, guidance:	Permanence ToR and Referral and Decision-making Form
Document owner:	Shirley Gounder
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