

## Placement Agreement Meetings

### ***In the words of a West Sussex young person: (June 2020)***

*'Sometimes meetings can make me angry as they talk about things from the past and talk about things that should have happened but didn't.*

*I have been able to find strategies to deal with this by leaving the room with support and then returning.*

*Sometimes I don't know what the focus of the meeting is, as it is not explained to me beforehand.*

*Sometimes I'm given information booklets that are too big, or I can't understand them.*

*I feel like the meeting should be done at my pace, social workers and others can forget that the young person is there and use words that I do not understand.*

*They should stop the meeting at certain points and ask if I have understood and whether I need things explained to me in a way that is easier to understand.*

*I think that placement meetings should take place at the existing home so if I was to get upset, I have a safe place like my bedroom that I feel relaxed in and I have familiar faces around me.*

*I would like to meet key staff before any meeting like a new key worker.*

*People need to talk so I can understand - don't use jargon and abbreviations.'*

### ***Purpose:***

The above captures what we are trying to avoid and to achieve. The child or young person should come first. There is a clear expectation that the meeting is about hopes for the child and the child should be kept at the centre of the meeting. What should be covered in the meeting is what is important for the child and the people caring for them. This should include day to day care, medical issues, contact, background, and safe caring.

***The process outlined below was agreed by a working party of representatives across West Sussex Children Looked After teams, the Fostering Service, Residential Care, and Voice of the Child, and is what we agreed 'Good looks like' for children and young people in our care.***

**Placement Agreement Meetings** (Note: name change from Placement Planning Meetings is to avoid confusion with Permanency Planning Meetings) should be convened as part of the process of identifying and placing a child - as set out in the **Placements in Foster Care Procedure** and the **Placements in Residential Care Procedure**.

The first Placement Agreement Meeting in relation to a placement should be held before the placement. Where this is not possible because of the urgency of the situation, it should be held in order that the Placement Plan is prepared within 5 working days of the start of the placement.

**Preparation for Placement Agreement Meetings:** The child's allocated social worker should see the child before the meeting to hear directly what the child would like included in this meeting. If this is not possible, the social worker should make time to speak individually with the child before the meeting starts.

The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that the child is given a guide to the Placement Agreement Meeting policy.

**If the child/young person is attending** this meeting, the social worker's preparation for the meeting MUST also include the following:

- A discussion with child about contacts and whether they are happy to discuss this in the meeting
- A discussion in advance with birth parents about contact, so parental views are known
- Consideration of whether the child would like a supportive friend to attend. If so, the meeting would have two parts: Part 1. Child and friend present; Part 2 Child present if they wish to be, but friend not present when completing confidential documents
- If a child or young person would like more support to have their voice heard before, within or after the meeting (even if they don't want to attend) they can contact [West Sussex Advocacy Team](#) or make use of the Mind of My Own One App from Google Play or Apple app store
- A discussion with child about venue to check that this is somewhere the child feels is safe and OK to meet.

**CONTACT:** Contact is really important for children and their parents, and as such, consideration MUST be given in advance of the Placement Agreement Meeting as to whether this is the best meeting to discuss the plans in detail.

- If contact plans are complex and need detailed discussion, consider setting up a separate contact meeting (this could be before or after with placement agreement meeting; attendees being made aware and views captured).
- Children and their families should not hear unexpected news about contact within the Placement Agreement Meeting.
- If contact is being discussed at the Placement Agreement Meeting, the child's social worker will need to have completed a referral/risk assessment and sent it to the Contact Supervision Team at least 24 hours before the meeting.
- An invitation should be sent to a representative from the Supervised Contact team to attend the relevant part of the meeting. This person will make notes regarding the contact plan and share the specific contact arrangement plan (dates, venues) following the meeting.

**Delegated Consent:** The child's social worker should look at the Delegated Consent Form and if required, complete this with parents, ideally in advance of meeting.

**Arranging and chairing Placement Agreement Meetings:**

The child's social worker, in consultation with the Supervising Social Worker/Residential Home Manager, is responsible for arranging the Placement Agreement Meeting within **5 working days** of the child being placed. The arrangements for chairing will be as follows:

**1. Fostering Placements:**

The meeting will be chaired and minuted by the Supervising Social Worker for the foster carer(s), whether they are internal West Sussex foster carer(s) or Family and Friend foster carer(s), or carer(s) from an Independent Fostering Agency(IFA).

The setting up of the meeting should be a collaborative process between the child's social worker, and the supervising worker for the carer(s), to ensure that the people most relevant to the child attend (see below) at the most suitable venue.

**2. Residential Care:**

The manager of the residential care home will chair and minute the meeting, whether this is a West Sussex home, or independent residential provision.

Before any meeting, the chairperson should obtain or be updated on the following, if available:

- The child's Placement Plan (recorded on the Placement Information Record on Mosaic);
- Any work which has been undertaken in supporting the child's placement;
- If relevant: the child's care plan, personal education plan and pathway plan.

Where the proposed placement has the effect of disrupting the arrangements made for the child's education and training - see **Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children Procedure**.

Where the proposed placement is out of area, see **Out of Area Placements Procedure**.

**Who should attend Placement Agreement Meetings:**

1. The child
2. The child's parent(s) and/or significant person (depending on child's views). The significant person could be a supportive friend (See preparation prompt above).
3. The child's social worker and/or other professional associated with the child e.g. Personal Adviser or advocate;
4. For children in foster care, the foster carers and their supervising social worker.
5. For children in residential care, the child's link worker/keyworker and the home manager;

Note: If a child or young person did not wish a parent to be present, the meeting could take place in two parts to accommodate this.

**Format of the Placement Agreement Meetings:**

The social worker and supervising social worker/home manager will agree the best format for the meeting.

If the child wishes to attend the meeting, the format should be dictated by the individual child needs/wishes, not by the format of the form.

The chairperson should also ensure that the child, parent(s) and others who have been asked to contribute understand the purpose of the meeting, how it will be conducted and are given the opportunity to put their views and suggestions.

The chair is asked to keep in mind the advice of the young person at the start of this guidance.

Information needed by the carer(s) for the Placement Agreement Form, completion/ signing of the Delegated Authority Form and other Child Looked After paperwork their opportunity to contribute.

The child should be encouraged to take breaks whenever they need to and be made aware that they do need to remain for the whole of the meeting if they do not wish to.

When meetings are to be held virtually, consideration needs to be given prior to the meeting about how this will be for the child and those attending, and preparations made to ensure the child and attendees can be fully involved.

**Venue:**

If the child is attending the meeting, the venue should, above all, be somewhere that the child feels is safe and OK to meet. This is most likely to be where the child is going to be living, or is already living, which will also allow the child to easily take breaks. Children should not be expected to attend offices for their Placement Agreement Meeting. Where there are security issues about birth parents being given the carer(s) home address, the meeting could take place in two parts.

If there are concerns about the suitability of the placement, consideration should be given to the following:

- Whether it is possible to sustain the placement until the next looked after review by, for example, providing additional support to the placement;
- Bringing forward the date of the next Looked After Review;
- Ending the placement.

**Review Placement Agreement Meetings and good practice:**

Further Placement Agreement Meetings should be held at intervals agreed with the carer(s) and their supervising social worker/ manager of the residential home - or as required, for example where there are things to be resolved in relation to the day to day arrangements for the placement.

**1.Fostering Placements:**

In terms of good practice, a joint social work home visit between the Child’s social worker and the supervising social worker should be incorporated into statutory visits; taking place as soon as possible after the child is placed, and then again before each 6 monthly Child Looked After Review. Information gathered by the social worker can then be used as a basis for the report for the Child Looked After Review.

**Joint home visits:** The purpose of the joint visits is to check how things are going from the child’s perspective (Social Worker), and from the carer(s)’ perspective (Supervising Social Worker), and to do so in a collaborative way that aids good communication between everyone.

**2.Residential Care:**

Good practice involves frequent contact between the child’s allocated social worker and the home, including reviewing of the Placement Agreement Plan on a weekly, and sometimes daily basis according to the child or young person’s needs, also in consultation with the Independent Reviewing Officer.

<b>Review / Contacts / References</b>	
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