



Guidance for Requesting Placements for Children in Care (October 2017)

This guidance sets out how services will work together when children and young people come into care and require accommodation.

Wherever possible we seek to support families to stay together because this is usually in the best long-term interests of children. We also seek to support families in the least intrusive way, helping parents to take responsibility for decision-making and care arrangements for their children.

Where a child comes into care, we seek to ensure the child is placed in family based care as this delivers the best outcomes. At the same time, parallel planning should be undertaken by the child's Social Worker to explore all other options, for example provision of support to assist reunification home, short breaks, kinship care, foster to adopt, adoption (including adoption to a relative) or SGOs/ child arrangement orders where there are relatives with a close connection and prior involvement in child's life (Connected Persons). There should also be careful consideration about the education available for the young person especially in residential settings, which will require full discussion with the Virtual School Team/and or SENAR.

The voice of the child should always be taken into account and their views considered when decisions are made about a placement that affects them. Achieving the right placement and how it can impact on their future wellbeing and stability cannot be overemphasised. Not only will this save time in the long run but it can also create beneficial turning points in their life as well as result in a successful placement.

Placement requests and decision making will be guided by the following:

Planned Placements

1. All requests for accommodation and placement moves must be done in a planned way so that every effort is made to reduce same day placements, emergency placements and increase the number of planned referrals.

Placement Requests

2. New referrals for accommodation should be agreed at Area Resource Panels and all placement moves should be considered/ recommended by Placement Review Panels.

3. Where circumstances do not allow this, prior agreement must be obtained from the Head of Service/ Area AD justifying how the accommodation request/ placement move meets the outcomes and the long term plan for the child. This should be a pro-active process building on evidence from the child's care plan about early Care Planning, permanency options and the exploration of alternative placements.
4. All placement requests must be strengths-based and the Accommodation Request Form must have the right information about the young person that enables the best chance of a placement-match in the least intrusive environment.
5. Where it would be helpful, a young person's profile or a statement about their needs and wishes can also be sent with the Accommodation Request Form.
6. Any learning from previous placements and disruption meetings must be shared including how any challenges can be overcome.
7. Tight or restrictive criteria must be avoided by Social Workers e.g. request for residential only, or out of authority placements. Specific residential homes or foster carers/fostering agencies must not be named in the placement request. Remember that providers (internal or external) are reliant on this information to determine a suitable placement. Poor information will result in delays, future disruptions and weak offers.
8. A conversational element has been introduced into the placement process so that, where required, the team and the Placement Worker can attune the information for the Accommodation Request Form so that it contains correct and balanced information about the child. The Accommodation Request Form should not be finalised until all conversations with the Placements Team have taken place and the Area Head of Service has authorised its submission. It can continue to be amended up until this point.
9. Following this, when there is a potential placement offer, there will be an opportunity to hold a conference call between the Social Worker, Provider and Placements Worker to "fine tune" the placement requirements, where needed.

Education Provision

10. When requesting a placement careful consideration needs to be made about the availability of educational provision locally and any cost implications. If a young person is put 'on roll' at a local mainstream school then there are no extra costs. However if the young person is placed out of area and is not able to go on roll in a mainstream school or has to attend Alternative Provision, their education incurs an extra cost which has to be negotiated between the school, Children's

Services, SENAR or the Virtual School(via Pupil Premium Plus in the form of a 'top-up').

Placement Offers

11. All placement options will be explored in the following order:
 - a. Internal fostering
 - b. External (Agency) fostering using the Regional Fostering Framework
 - c. Spot purchasing of external fostering placements
 - d. Residential Block Contract Homes (Priory and Meadows)
 - e. Purchasing of residential placements within the Birmingham boundary (this may be via the West Midlands Regional Residential Framework or Spot Purchase)
 - f. Spot Purchasing of residential placements outside of the Birmingham boundary, using the West Midlands Regional Residential Framework
 - g. Spot Purchasing of residential placements nationally
 - h. Semi-Independent living for 16-17 year olds using the West Midlands Regional Framework for Supported Accommodation
12. Placements searches for all options except internal fostering must be done through the West Midlands Placements Portal and specific providers cannot be approached until the open-search has been exhausted.
13. In order to prioritise the use of internal fostering and help identify potential carers, foster care profiles will be made available to Social Workers and Team Managers by the Internal Fostering Team. A foster carer service offer will also be made available defining the support and services to be provided by foster carers, as covered within their fees.
14. Best use will be made of all locally-based provision within the City or within 20 miles of the City boundary so that there is minimum disruption to the child's social networks, education and health provision and to ensure that they can continue to be supported by professionals already known to them. Any new placement should not adversely affect the child's educational placement.
15. In order to maintain a tight grip on the use of all available and local resources and adhere to the above hierarchy of accommodation options, the placement choices offered to the Social Worker by the Placements Team should be accepted as viable offers. Rejection of such placement offers will be escalated to the respective Area HoS, Area AD and the AD for CiC and Provider Services who will determine the best and final solution.

Placement Breakdown

16. The Placements Team must be notified of any disruption meetings and alerts to potential placement breakdowns at the earliest opportunity, so that searches can begin straight away and a planned transition takes place to the new placement.
17. Where there are signs that a placement may breakdown, the Social Worker should consider holding a care planning/ strategy meeting with all relevant agencies to explore how to stabilise the placement. The Placement Team should be notified as early as possible during this period so that they can work with the Social Worker and provider (internal or external) to identify ways of stabilising the placement for as long as possible while an alternative is found. The Area Head of Service or EDT Senior on-call officer, in consultation with the Placement Team Manager, must authorise any additional resources that may help to maintain the placement in order to prevent an emergency/ same day placement move.
18. Social Workers should not agree to another placement, even if it is with the same Provider, without prior discussion and agreement with the Placements Team.
19. Internal fostering should always be considered first, regardless of the placement being vacated.

Placement Termination

20. Where there are signs that a placement may break down, is due to end or where the Provider serves notice on a placement, Social Workers must immediately inform the Placements Team so that they can take a solution-focussed approach with the Provider to explore options to stabilise the placement (albeit temporarily) or postpone termination until an alternative is found. This also allows a planned move to take place.
21. In some cases, Providers may offer to move young people within their organisation to prevent placement breakdown or to accommodate their needs. This should not be agreed by Social Workers, without first speaking to the Placement Duty Manager.
22. Where a placement is not working for a child and the Social Worker wishes to terminate the arrangement, the Social Worker must complete a Placement Termination Form and email this to the Provider and the Placement Team at the same time so that a planned move can take place.
23. The notice period will be dependent on the type of contract and length of placement. Please contact the Placements or Commissioning Team for advice. As already noted earlier (point 17), the Social Worker, Provider and the Placements Team must work together to identify ways of stabilising the placement for as long as possible while an alternative is found.

24. Failure to serve timely notice incurs unnecessary costs to the Children's Trust and will be highlighted in quarterly performance reports for each area team.

Missing from Placement

25. Where a young person absconds, is absent or missing, the appropriate Missing Children Procedures must be followed. The procedures are available on:

http://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/docs_library.html#case_management

26. In these situations, and if the child is absent for any reason, the Placements Team must be notified. The Placements Team may be able to negotiate a fee reduction where a child is absent from a placement for more than a week. Social Workers should not ask Providers to keep a bed open without discussing with the Placements Team.

27. Failure to serve timely notice incurs unnecessary costs to the Children's Trust and will be highlighted in quarterly performance reports for each area team.

Out of Authority Placements

28. A process for sending notifications for all Out Of Authority (OOA) placements is being produced and will be added to this guidance in due course.

EDT Placements

29. Where a placement disrupts out of hours (i.e. between 17.15 – 09.00 hours during weekdays, weekends and public holidays), EDT must first negotiate for the child to remain in placement until the next working day so that the Social Worker and Placements Team can arrange a planned move.

30. If this is not possible, or there is a safeguarding issue and the child must be accommodated, EDT foster carers must be approached first for all emergency placements.

31. Where the child's existing placement is with an External (Agency) foster carer, the Agency is responsible for providing emergency/ respite cover and EDT should refer back to the Provider.

32. If EDT Foster carers are unable to offer a placement, options will be explored by EDT in the following order:

- a. External (Agency) foster carers on the West Midlands Regional Fostering Framework
- b. Residential Block Contract Homes (Priory and Meadows)

- c. Purchasing of residential placements within the Birmingham boundary (through the West Midlands Regional Residential Framework or Spot Purchase)
 - d. Spot Purchasing of residential placements outside of the Birmingham boundary, through the West Midlands Regional Residential Framework
 - e. Spot Purchasing of residential placements nationally
 - f. Semi-Independent living for 16-17 year olds using the West Midlands Regional Framework for Supported Accommodation
33. Requests for PACE beds or Bail and Remand beds are to be dealt with by EDT in the same way i.e. explore options for the young person to remain in custody, with EDT foster carers or residential providers.
34. An updated list of providers offering emergency provision, with emergency contact details and the order in which they must be approached is supplied to EDT by the Commissioning Team. This must be used for conducting emergency placements searches in accordance with the search guidance.
35. The Senior EDT on-call officer (usually an AD) must authorise any placements or requests for additional resources which incur costs paid to external fostering agencies, residential homes or supported accommodation providers.
36. All out-of hours placements or emergency support agreed by EDT to stabilise a placement, are interim arrangements and must be reviewed the next working day by the Social Worker and Placements Team. No long term arrangements can be entered into by EDT as this decision rests with the Social Worker with approval of the respective Head of Service/AD.
37. EDT will send notifications and the required paperwork to the Social Worker and Placements Team so they can take the necessary steps to ensure a placement is found that is in accordance with the child's care plan, and complies with guidance set out in this document

Placement Reviews

38. All placements must be kept under regular review by Social Workers and Team Managers, with a view to stepping down to family based care at the earliest opportunity e.g. reunification home, fostering or adoption. This includes constant review of any time-limited support or therapeutic interventions to ensure they are making a positive difference to the young person. Placement Review Panels will have oversight and responsibility for this work.

Notifying HM Revenue and Customs

39. HM Revenue & Customs should be notified when a child has been 'looked after' by Birmingham Children's Trust for eight weeks or more so that the Child Benefit can be cancelled. The notification form can be accessed via this [link](#).

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Glossary/Service Descriptions

Term	Meaning
Same day placement request	Placement required on the day.
Next day placement	Placement required the next day with a view to a medium to long term placement e.g. cases when the Social Worker is planning to go into Court.
Emergency placement request	Placement required within 5 days, with a view to a short to long term placement.
Planned placement request	Placement required within 28 days or less.
Bridging placement	Bridging placement required when a child is moved from their short or long term placement in an emergency and notice has been served. The bridging placement covers the notice period or until an alternative longer term or more suitable placement is found.
Short term placement	Ideally, most placements should be short term to allow support and interventions to be delivered to the child and/or the family and plans put in place for reunification, where appropriate.
Long term placement	<p>This term should only be used if the child's placement is permanency matched in fostering or this has been identified as a long term residential placement via the statutory review process.</p> <p>For those children likely to be in care long-term, other options must be explored e.g. Permanency placements, adoption etc. For those children whose care plan is for Long Term Foster Care, their</p>

	placement can only be sourced via the Family Finding Team.
External placement	Child is placed with an independent provider (fostering or residential) but may still be based in Birmingham.
Out of Borough (OOB) or Out of Authority (OOA)	Child is placed outside of Birmingham in another Local Authority area. When this happens, the Area Business Support must send a notification to the respective Local Authority Safeguarding Team, notifying them of the placement.
Residential care	Placement with a registered children's home usually 1 - 4 bedded units.
Fostering	Placement with a foster carer who is approved by either the Local Authority or an Independent Fostering Agency.
Supported accommodation	Semi-independent living for 16-17 year olds who are ready for transition to adulthood and require minimum supervision. This is unregulated provision and should not be used if the Young Person is vulnerable and requires care.
Step down foster care	This is a contracted service which helps young people move out of residential care into therapeutic fostering. The transition is carefully planned and managed, including close matching to foster carer. Each young person has a Peer Mentor (who has been in care themselves) to support and advocate for them.
Mainstream education provision	An educational setting that places the young person on roll allowing funding to be 'drawn down' from the DfE.
Alternative provision	In the event that a young person is not on roll at an educational provider and therefore has to attend an Alternative provider, the full cost of this have to be negotiated between the school, Children's Services or SENAR as these places are not funded by the Virtual School.