



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Placement with Parents
Practice Guidance

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Any questions or concerns about the contents of this policy should be raised with the Quality Assurance and Policy Team via email at: ImpactAndInspectionTeam@wokingham.gov.uk.

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What is a placement with parents and when should it be used?

This practice guidance applies to any placement of a child on an Interim Care Order or a Care Order, with a parent or person with parental responsibility, for more than 24 hours. This includes children where there is a planned transition taking place to their parents' care and there are any overnight stays which will be over 24 hours. Social workers should ensure the parent has parental responsibility before the Placement with Parents process is begun.

It does **not** apply to children subject to Interim Care Orders where the placement is required by the court under Section 38(6) of the Children Act 1989 for the purposes of assessment (and is therefore not subject to the Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations 2010). In these cases, Assistant Director approval is not required.

Although these children are considered to be 'Looked After' children (or in Wokingham 'Children in Care'), the placement is regulated by the court and therefore only the court can make the decision to end the placement or assessment. The police may still exercise their protective powers under Section 46 of the Children Act 1989, if they have reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm.

A Placement with Parents Agreement can only be made in accordance with regulations, as set out in [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#), specifically within Part 4 regulations 15 to 20, and Schedules 2 and 3 (referred to in this document as "regulation/s")

Reunification of children with their parents is most successful when it is well planned, based on robust assessment of risk, allows children to go home gradually and where there are services in place to support the family for as long as they are needed.

Planned placements with parents

The typical circumstances where a placement with parents may be considered are:

- A planned placement at the start of care proceedings;
- A planned placement during care proceedings, for example as part of a transition home;
- A planned placement at the conclusion of care proceedings;
- A placement made after the conclusion of care proceedings, as part of a planned reunification with the ultimate goal of discharging the Care Order;
- An immediate placement in case of emergency, for example a breakdown in foster care when there is **already** a permanence plan for a child to return home.

Social workers should be mindful that the making of a Care Order on the basis of a plan for the child to remain in the care of their parents at the conclusion of proceedings, should only take place if there are exceptional reasons for this. In general, a Care Order should not be used for the provision of support and services, because these should be offered through other means; for example, a Supervision Order.

In most circumstances, the risks of significant harm to the child are either concerning enough that the child should be removed from their parents' care, or they are managed to the extent that the child can return or remain at home under the auspices of a lesser order. A Care Order represents a serious intervention by the state in the life of the child and their parents, with respect to their Article 8 rights.

Should a Care Order with Placement with Parents be deemed appropriate, consent of the Assistant Director is required prior to the application being made to the court.

This practice guidance should be read in conjunction with the Wokingham Children's Services procedure for Placement with Parents¹.

Key principles of placements with parents

The decision to place a child with their parents under a Care Order should be informed by the principles that:

- Children and young people are best placed with their families when it is safe to do so;
- A relationship and strengths-based/safety-orientated approach should be central to our practice;
- Our practice framework will hold the child and their family in the centre of our work and will draw on trauma-informed, systemic and signs of safety approaches;
- Placements with parents should be seen as a short term, temporary arrangement, with a view to returning to court to discharge the Care Order;
- Any decision to place a child with their parents will be informed by a satisfactory holistic assessment which clearly explores the original risks and how these have been mitigated;
- There will be strict planning and oversight once the child is placed;
- There will be a continued assessment of risk and need.

The purpose of any Placement with Parents Agreement should be to work with the parents and child to achieve the agreed plan. Wokingham Children's Services does not seek to share parental responsibility with a child's parents for the duration of their childhood. The placement should be continually reviewed to ensure that it continues to be in the child's best interests and that it is still appropriate and safe for the child to be placed in this way.

Where the plan is for a **series of short-term placements** of a child with their parent - for example in the case of a phased transition home - the requirements for consultation, assessment and checks can be carried out once rather than every time the child goes home, provided that:

- All the placements take place within a twelve-month period;
- No single placement is for a period of more than four weeks;
- The total duration of the placements does not exceed 90 days.

If the series of short-term placements is as part of a rehabilitation plan, further consultation and approval from the Assistant Director must be obtained before the child returns home full-time.

¹ https://www.proceduresonline.com/wokingham/childcare/p_place_with_parents.html

Assessing a placement with parents

The assessment which informs the proposal for a placement with parents will usually be a Child and Family or Reunification Assessment, although this may also be informed by a parenting assessment completed as part of care proceedings. Before deciding to place the child with their parent, the social worker must assess the suitability of the parent to care for the child and to meet their needs as set out in their Care Plan, bearing in mind that the child will remain a Child in Care. The assessment must also include an assessment of the suitability of the accommodation, and the suitability of any adult over the age of 18 within the household.

It is important to remember that a Care Order, or an Interim Care Order, is made on the basis that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of the care provided to them by their parents. Therefore, any assessment to consider placing such a child with their parents must carefully balance risks and strengths, what has changed since the making of the Care Order or the Interim Care Order, and whether any risks can be managed sufficiently to allow the children to remain or return to their care.

The assessment should be carried out in line with Wokingham's [Practice Guidance](#) for completing assessments. The assessment should be a holistic assessment which considers parenting capacity, wider family and environmental factors as well as the specific needs of the child. The assessment will need to consider:

- The grounds for the Care Order; for example, if there has been domestic abuse or parental drug and alcohol use which have impacted on parenting capacity;
- What support has been provided and accessed;
- The extent to which there is evidence of positive change. Social workers should remember that it is not enough that parents are engaging with support. In order for the child to be safe enough in their care, there must be evidence that this support is making a difference and reducing the risks that led to the child coming into care.
- The history of the child and their parents, both before the child came into care and since;
- Any new parental partners or children that may now be in the household that the child is returning to, and any risk or protective factors that these individuals may add to the family dynamics, and their relationship with the child;
- The impact of any member of the household over the age of 18 (in addition to the parents), via the use of police and/or enhanced DBS checks;
- How the placement can be supported by services as well as informal support networks, such as family and friends.

Consultation about the proposed Placement with Parents

Key people must be consulted in writing about the proposed plan, such as the child and both parents (or anyone else who has parental responsibility), as well as any foster carers, schools, and/or health professional involved with the child. When thinking about who to consult, practitioners should consider who the key people in the child's life are. (See the relevant chapter in our procedures [here](#) for a full list). See [Appendix 4](#) for a sample consultation letter.

Making a request for approval of a Placement with Parents Plan

In line with the 2010 regulations, Wokingham expectations are that the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help will need to approve any placement with parents. A Placement Plan is prepared before any plan to place a child back in their parents' care is put into effect. The **Placement with Parent Request Form** on Mosaic should be completed in full and sent to the Team Manager (alongside the latest draft version of the Placement with Parents Agreement and Placement Plan) for checking and then on to the Service Manager - who will in turn forward to the Assistant Director for final agreement.

Before approving the placement with parents, the Service Manager and Assistant Director must be satisfied that:

- The child's wishes and feelings have been ascertained;
- The assessment as to the suitability of the parent has been carried out;
- The placement will safeguard and promote the child's welfare;
- The IRO has been consulted.²

Agreement should be recorded on Mosaic by the Service Manager and Assistant Director.

Placement with Parents Agreements and Placement Plans

All Placement with Parents should be underpinned by a written Placement with Parents Agreement, as set out within the child's Placement Plan **and agreed and signed by the parents, the child, the social worker and the team manager.**

The purpose of this is to make clear what the expectations of the parents are, and what support will be offered during the period of the placement. This document represents the Safety Plan for the placement.

NOTE: To initiate the process on Mosaic, the social worker will need to trigger the **Decision to Seek Accommodation** step (if the child is not currently looked after) OR the **Request for permanent change in placement** step (if the child is already looked after).

This will then allow the social worker to select and complete the *Placement with Parents Request Form* for Assistant Director sign-off. The **LAC Planning** step will then be triggered, which includes the **Placement Planning** step.

In addition to information required for any Child in Care, The Care Planning Regulations 2010 set out that the Placement Plan for a placement with parents must include:

- The obligation on the parents to notify the local authority of any relevant change in circumstances, including any intention to change address, any changes in the household in which the child lives, and of any serious incident involving the child;

² If the child is already a Child in Care, the proposed placement with parents should be discussed and agreed at a Child in Care Review meeting, and endorsed by the Independent Reviewing Officer.

In the event that it is not possible to hold a Child in care Review (for example when working to a fixed court timetable) then an alternative forum should be convened in order to obtain the IRO's views, such as a Permanency Planning Meeting.

- for example - child is missing, any injury, any hospital, witness to any domestic incident, any police involvement, not attending school - note this list is not exhaustive and will be detailed in the placement plan.
- The obligation on the parent to ensure that any information given in confidence to the parents in connection with the child's placement is kept confidential. Furthermore, to ensure such information is not disclosed to any person without the consent of the local authority;
- The circumstances in which it is necessary to obtain the prior approval of the local authority for the child to live in a household other than the parent's household;
- The arrangements for requesting a change to the Placement Plan;
- The circumstances in which the placement will be terminated.

These are part of the undertaking signed by parents within this section of the Placement Plan.

See [Appendix 1](#) for details in a flow chart.

All placements with parents will need to be reviewed in accordance with Wokingham's practice standards. Any plan to discharge the Care Order should be part of the child in care review process and requires a planned approach unless it is an emergency. See [Appendix 3](#) for details.

All those consulted about the making of a placement with parents must be informed in writing when the placement is made.

Immediate placements with parents

In some cases, it may be considered in the best interests of the child to make a placement with parents arrangement before the assessment is complete (Regulation 19). For example, in the case of an unforeseen breakdown of a foster placement requiring the child's immediate removal, where the child's permanence plan has already been for them to return to their parents' care in the future.

In these circumstances, an Assistant Director can approve an immediate placement without the necessary consultation and checks set out above, provided that the following is identified on the case file:

- There are exceptional circumstances which justify the immediate placement, and it is consistent with the child's welfare;
- There has been an interview with the proposed carer who agrees to the placement;
- The accommodation has been seen;
- Information has been obtained about any other people in the household, including via police checks;
- Checks are made with partners, and notifications that the placement has been made are sent out in writing.

The decision to place the child on this basis and the reasons for this must be recorded on the child's file by the Service Manager and Assistant Director. The child's social worker should also inform the Independent Reviewing Officer of the circumstances leading to the immediate placement within 24 hours.

At the time of making the placement, the Placement with Parents Agreement within the Placement Plan should be developed and agreed by relevant parties in order to safeguard the child during this temporary period.

In such circumstances, the practitioner will need to trigger the ***Request for Permanent change in placement*** Mosaic step, which will prompt social worker to complete a ***Placement with Parents Request Form*** and then seek Assistant Director approval. The ***LAC Planning*** step will then be triggered, which includes the ***Placement Planning*** step.

If the placement is subsequently confirmed, the Placement Plan must be reviewed and, if necessary, amended.

The full Child and Family or Reunification Assessment considering the suitability of the placement with parents must be carried out **within 10 working days of the child returning to their parents' care**, in accordance with Regulation 17. This will enable early identification of any issues and support needs and will ensure that all relevant checks have been completed.

Within ten working days of the assessment, a decision must be taken as to whether the placement should be confirmed or not in accordance with regulation 19 (i.e. 20 working days from the date that the child goes to live with the parent).

See [Appendix 2](#) for details in a flow chart.

Appendix 1 - Process for making a Placement with Parents

Assessment

The assessment recommends that a Placement with Parents is the appropriate plan. This could be a Child and Family Assessment, Reunification Assessment, or a Parenting Assessment if we are already in care proceedings. As with any assessment, multi-agency checks must be completed in relation to all members of the household, including police checks for any adult.



Child in Care Review

If the child is already a Child in Care, the proposed placement with parents should be discussed and agreed at a Child in Care Review meeting and endorsed by the Independent Reviewing Officer. In the event that it is not possible to hold a Child in care Review (for example when working to a fixed court timetable) then an alternative forum should be convened in order to obtain the IRO's views, such as a Permanency Planning Meeting.

Before the child can be placed, the following people **must be consulted in writing** and their views formally recorded -

- a) The child
- b) Both parents (including any parent who is not the proposed carer of the child)
- c) Any other person with parental responsibility
- d) Any other member of the family who is significant to the child
- e) Relevant professionals involved with the family



Assistant Director and Service Manager Approval and Placement with Parents Request

Seek Service Manager approval for the placement with parents using the Mosaic form ***Placement with Parents Request***. It is best practice for this request to be accompanied by a draft version of the Placement with Parents Agreement and Placement Plan.

If SM and AD agree the suitability of the proposed placement, they will sign off the request and add a management footprint to the child's file.



Finalising the Placement with Parents Agreement and Placement Plan

Complete the *Placement with Parents Agreement* within the child's Mosaic Placement Plan

The agreement must make clear what the expectations of the parent are, **including relevant timescales and targets** and what support will be offered during the period of the placement.

Actions should be SMART.

A clear safety plan and a contingency plan must be included.

This agreement needs to be agreed and signed by all parties including the parents, child if applicable, Social Worker, Team Manager, Service Manager, and AD.

Notify in writing all those consulted about the plan when made

Appendix 2 - Immediate Placement with Parents

Visit and undertake checks regarding the suitability of placement, including police checks on any adults in the household.



Initiate **Placement with Parents Request** form on Mosaic, via the **Request for Permanent change in placement** step.

If AD and SM agree the suitability of the proposed placement, they will sign off the request and add a management footprint to the child's file. **LAC Planning** step then triggered, which includes the **Placement Planning** step.



Child's social worker to complete the **Placement Plan** (Placement with Parents Agreement)
The agreement must make clear what the expectations of the parent are, **including relevant timescales and targets** and what support will be offered during the period of the placement.

Actions should be SMART

A clear safety plan and a contingency plan must be included

This agreement needs to be agreed and signed by all parties including the parents, child if applicable, Social Worker, Team Manager, Service Manager, and Assistant Director.



Assistant Director approval for emergency placement.

Within 10 days the social worker will complete a full assessment and update the Placement with Parents Agreement

Notify agencies in writing to consult regarding the PWP and inform has been made.

Appendix 3 - Reviewing and Ending the Placement with Parents

Visiting a Child Placed with their Parents

Children in PWP should be visited within 3 working days of the placement being made. If this is a temporary placement pending approval or the child is placed under an Interim Care Order, visits must be weekly until the first CIC review, and at least once every 20 working days.

Visits to children on a Care Order should be in line with Practice Standards for Children in Care.

The Placement with Parents Agreement and/or the child's care plan may stipulate more frequent visits and this should be agreed on a case-by-case basis and reviewed in care planning meetings.

NOTE: When considering the frequency of visiting for a child placed with parents, practitioners should be especially mindful of the unique risks that may be posed to the child by returning to the care of their parents, and should consider whether this warrants a frequency of visiting that goes beyond statutory requirements and/or Wokingham Practice Standards.



Reviewing the Placement with Parents

Formal review of a placement with parents will take place in line with statutory timescales and Practice Guidance for Children in Care. Permanency Planning meetings should take place between reviews

(Note: WBC Permanency Planning Guidance can be found under the **Permanency Planning** section of our **local resources library**)

Any change in placement should be discussed with the Independent Reviewing Officer to decide whether the date of the next Child in Care Review should be brought forward.

Discharge of the Care Order should be considered within 6 months of the placement and at each subsequent review of a child placed with parents. This will be tracked by the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting.

The decision to continue a Placement with Parents beyond 6 months must be agreed with the Service Manager and Assistant Director, and should consider:

- What is working well
- What we are worried about
- Whether the Care Order and/or Placement with Parents remains the best plan for the child.



Ending the Placement

Most Placements with Parents should end with the successful discharge of the Care Order, however if there are concerns it may be appropriate to continue. Service Manager approval will be required to continue a PWP.

Wherever possible the decision to end a Placement with Parents should be made at a Child in Care Review and there should be a plan to conclude statutory involvement.

No less than 14 days notice of removal of the child should be given to the parents, except in an emergency.

Legal advice must always be sought before taking any action.

All those notified of the PWP starting should be notified, in writing, when it ends. A letter should also be sent to the parents and child (if appropriate) explaining why the decision was made.

Appendix 4 - Sample consultation letter

Childrens Services

Civic Offices

Shute End

Wokingham

RG40 1BN

Mobile:

Email

Date:

Dear

When considering placing any child who is subject to a Care Order or an Interim Care Order with a parent or person with parental authority, the Local Authority must consult you in writing and your views must be taken into account.

We are considering placing **name of child (DoB) / children (DoB)** with **name of parents/ person with parental authority** at **add address**.

It is proposed that it is in **add name of child or children** best interests to be live with their **mother / father / parents**.

As part of the decision making process I am seeing your view regarding the plan for **add the name of the child or children** to live with **mother / father / parents** and would appreciate if you could complete the following and return to me within 14 days.

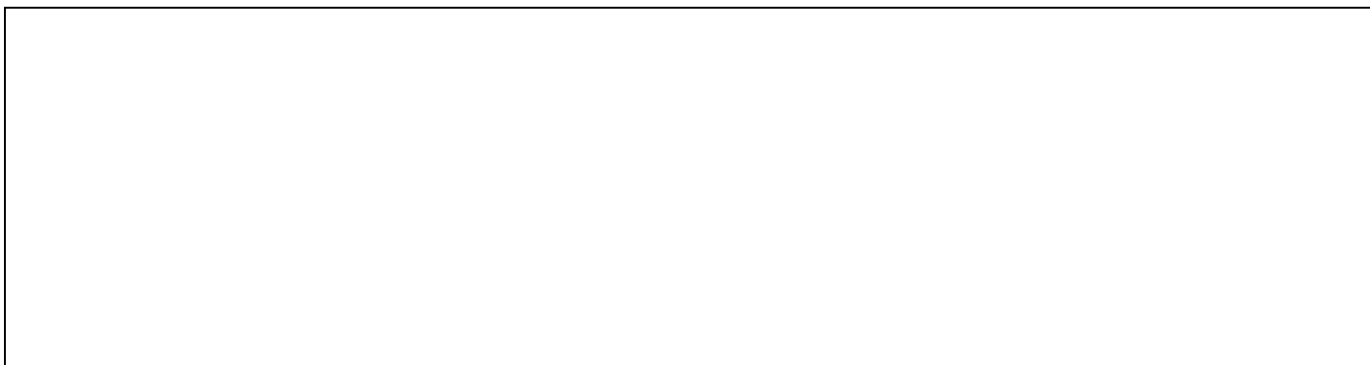
Unless we hear from you to the contrary, it will be assumed that you are in agreement with the proposed placement. Written notice of the decision regarding placement will be provided.

Do you agree with placement of **name of child / children** with **name of the adults**?

Yes

No

Please explain why you think this and outline any concerns you may have.



Yours sincerely
Social Worker

Appendix 5 - Relevant legislation, guidance and useful links

- **The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010**
- **Children Act 1989**
- NSPCC Reunification: An evidence-informed framework for return home practice
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2015/reunification-practice-framework>