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A guide to County Wide Decision-making panels in Devon

How decision-making panels support good practice and outcomes for children in Devon

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# Purpose of this document

The purpose of this guide is to support practitioners with an understanding of why we have panels in Devon, how they can support your practice, and how to prepare for them.

# What panels do we have in Devon?

There are four main Countywide panels, chaired by Heads of Service, that all Social Workers and Managers need to understand.

There is a separate panel for children with disabilities and multi-agency funding arrangements.

1. **Practice & Resources Panel:** this panel is for requests to offer care to a child under S.20 of the Children Act 1989 as well as requests for significant packages of care or support that help to prevent that from happening. The panel will also consider requests for privately funded therapeutic interventions and resources for families with no recourse to public funds. This panel is for children and young people who are not in long term care, and so it will be mostly used by the Assessment & Intervention Teams and Children and Families Teams. Where children have been accommodated under S.20 in an emergency then they will need to be brought to the next panel for a review of the plan and next steps.
2. **Legal Gateway Panel:** this panel is to review and ratify plans to keep children safe though the initiation of the Public Law Outline or care proceedings. This panel can at the same time agree resources that are part of that plan – for example, where this requires an independent assessment.
3. **Permanence Panel:** this panel is for children and young people who are in our care long term. The panel will review plans for permanence, can agree matching and resource requests, and will also place a focus on children who are experiencing multiple disruptions.
4. **Disabled Children’s Resource Panel:** this panel is for children and young people who are in our Disabled Children’s social work teams. The panel will consider new requests and reviews for short breaks or support where there is a resource allocation needed. The panel can agree matching and resource requests for looked after children and will also consider requests to agree resources as part of a child’s plan (where Practice and Resources Panel, or Legal Gateway Panel would not be the appropriate panel).

## Why do we have these panels?

The panels are designed to support practice and to share responsibility for important decisions that have a big impact on children’s lives. Heads of Service chair them to support good decision making, the best use of the resources and to ensure that children and families across the County are receiving a consistent level of service.

## How does this fit with Restorative Practice?

We want to support children to live safely with their families and in their communities wherever possible. The support and challenge of a Senior Manager who can offer an objective perspective, grounded in years of practice experience, will help to shape a culture where we are all working toward this shared goal. When it’s necessary to intervene in family life to safeguard a child or to bring them into care, we need to work together as an organisation to ensure that we do this without drift or delay, and that high quality practice plans are in place that lead to permanence for children.

## Will I need to attend the panel?

You will need to attend to present your request or recommendations for the child, along with a Team or Service Manager. You can prepare by making sure you know the child and the situation well, and by giving a concise summary of your recommendations, contingencies, and next steps. The Chair and other panel members will be curious about the impact of your plan and will want to ask questions. For example, if you are asking to bring a child into care due to family breakdown, what have you done to prevent this, what will you do once they are in care, and how will you help them to return home? Remember, these panels have been set up to consider requests that have life-long implications for children, so it is right that we take time together to reflect and be open to other possible ways of achieving an outcome.

## What if the situation is an emergency or requires an urgent decision?

If the situation is an emergency, then seek advice from a Head of Service to deal with the situation, ensure children are safe and well, and bring the request to panel after that.

## What if I am not sure which panel I should attend?

There will always be situations that will fall into more than one category. We want to avoid duplication so you should choose the panel that seems the most relevant. If you aren’t sure, then talk to your Service Manager or Head of Service for advice, but you should only attend one panel even if there are several strands to the decision. For example, if a child is in long-term care and you wish to request a private therapeutic intervention to support the stability of their fostering arrangement, this would go to Permanence panel for a decision. If you want to accommodate a child under S.20 in a children’s home who would be new into care due to a family breakdown, this will go to the Practice and Resources panel. If you want to initiate legal proceedings and need an independent assessment as part of that plan, this could all be considered at the Legal Gateway panel.

## How do I book a place at panel?

**Requests for Practice & Resource and Permanence panels will need to be sent to:** [childrenssocialworkpanels-mailbox@devon.gov.uk](mailto:childrenssocialworkpanels-mailbox@devon.gov.uk)

**Requests for Disabled Children’s Resource Panel** are sent to [business.permanenceplanningdisabledchildren-mailbox@devon.gov.uk](mailto:business.permanenceplanningdisabledchildren-mailbox@devon.gov.uk)

## What paperwork do I need to submit?

A ‘Panel Application Form’ must be completed in advance of the requested panel (See Appendix).

* **Practice & Resource Panel:** Panel Members will review the most recent assessment and plan, or child protection report on Eclipse, as well as the last Supervision record. Please therefore ensure these are up-to-date.
* **Legal Gateway Panel:** Dependent on whether the case is new or a review, different paperwork is required to be submitted.

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| **NEW cases** | **REVIEW cases** |
| * Panel Request Form * Up to date Child & Family Assessment * Draft Court Care Plan (if relevant) * Draft PLO letter (if relevant) * Chronology. | * Panel Request Form * Legal Planning Form * Any other relevant new or updated documents including information relating to permanence planning and relevant key dates (court timetabling, filing of assessments). |

* **Permanence Panel:** Permanence Plan and minutes from the Permanence Planning Meeting. Where a proposed long-term fostering match is being considered, the matching form will be presented alongside the most recent Fostering Household Review.
* **Disabled Children’s Resource Panel:** Panel members will consider the panel request form and the child’s most recent assessment and plan on Eclipse.

In the long-term we are planning to integrate all forms into Eclipse to cut down on repetitive paperwork.

## Will the decision of the panel be recorded on the child’s file?

Yes, the decision will be uploaded to the file within 3 working days of the panel (wherever possible).

## What if I don’t agree with the decision of the panel?

Sometimes the panel may not agree to plans because more work is needed to try to prevent a big change such as bringing a child into care, or because the proposed impact of change and long-term consequences have not been fully explored. If you don’t agree with the decision that has been made it’s important to seek an opportunity for discussion and reflection to explore this with your manager, and making space for this is part of working in a restorative culture.

## When do panels take place?

* **Practice & Resource Panel:** Weekly on a Tuesday morning, between 9.30am-11.30am
* **Legal Gateway Panel:** Thursday mornings, across 2 panels – one for North and Mid/East, one for Exeter/South. One session 9.00am-11.00am and one from 11.30am-1.30pm.
* **Permanence Panel:** Weekly on a Wednesday, between 10.00am-2.00pm
* **Disabled Children’s Resource Panel:** Weekly on a Tuesday morning, between 10.00am–12.30pm

# Appendices

**(i) Panel Application Form**



**(ii) Panel Infographic**



**(iii) Terms of Reference**





