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**Devon County Council**

**Children’s Services**

**Securing Permanence: Policy, Procedure and Practice Standards**

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# Introduction

## Permanence Matters

We believe that a commitment to achieving permanency is essential to our work and should be the focus of our interventions with children and their families. The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that all workers in Children’s’ Services have a clear understanding of ‘Permanence’ and securing ‘Permanence’ for Devon’s children becomes central to the work we all undertake from the outset

* *Permanence is more than a policy, more than a set of procedures*
* *There needs to be a whole-system approach – a mind-set/culture that is all-pervading*
* *The impact on a child’s life of getting this right is immeasurable’ (Ofsted)*

## Permanence: What is it and why is it Important?

In its broadest sense permanence is an experience of security, stability and belonging.

In social work practice the permanence plan is the long-term plan for the child’s upbringing and provides an underpinning objective 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 and into adulthood.

Permanency planning is based on the principle that every child has the right to a permanent and stable home, preferably with their own family. The primary focus of permanency planning is to prevent children staying in care for longer than is necessary, with no sense of belonging or stability.

## What we will do:

Make sure that we achieve permanence for children and young people at the earliest opportunity.This will usually mean planning for a number of contingencyplans alongside each other at any one time.

Continue to work with children and young people to plan their care, understand who the important people in their lives are and where they would be best living.

Prevent placement breakdowns by continuing the support we give to the people who look after our children and young people.

Where adoption is the best plan, we will start to make arrangements as soon as we possibly can by working with Adopt South West.

Where children and young people are living with their family members we will work with both the child in care and the family members to explore whether a Special Guardianship Order may be appropriate, so that legal permanence for the child can be achieved.

High quality plans are central to the prevention of drift and delay to achieve a permanent placement as early as possible for children. We need to ensure children and young people are, from the earliest stages of involvement with social care, provided with information and supported to make sense of their life story and journey to permanence

Team Managers across Children’s Social Care oversee the effectiveness of care planning for individual children taking into account relevant research and current best practice including ensuring timely Permanence planning.

Social Workers lead on care planning for children, obtaining the views of the child and family members and taking these into account when proactively implementing the Permanence Plan.

The child’s Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) has a key role in providing independent review, advice and challenge to the plan and advocacy for the child in line with the IRO handbook. They also ensure every child has a Permanence Plan at the 4-month Child in Care Review. This is supported by the Permanence Panel which scrutinizes children’s Permanence Plans and addresses any delay in this area.

The question "how are the child's permanence needs being met?" must be at the core of everything we do.

## Options for permanence include:

* Reunification/Staying at home
* Connected care
* Foster care
* Special Guardianship Order (SGO)/ Child arrangement order (CAO)
* Adoption

Historically research on permanence planning has focused on looked after children, however, now it is widely agreed that planning for permanence should happen much earlier in the child’s journey. Research in Practice has compiled the most robust, evidence-informed practice on permanence planning to date. Their research demonstrates that practice is outstanding where:

Permanence planning is at the forefront of assessment, planning and intervention at every stage of social work involvement with children and their families.

There is critical decision-making with a clear understanding of the views and perspectives of children, their parents and carers.

Corporate parenting means not only providing for immediate needs but also planning the best life-long outcomes for children.

There are effective management oversight, tracking and escalation processes, giving social workers and managers a clear understanding about what needs to happen and when.

# Guiding Principles for Social Workers in Achieving Permanency

Eliminate drift for children by reaching the right permanence decision within a timeframe that meets their needs.

Act purposefully to identify a permanent home for the child without unnecessary deliberations which cause delay, understanding the potential damage to a child as a result of delay

Build a strong knowledge of permanence options to effectively explore all realistic options concurrently to avoid delay and consider the strengths and risks of each option.

Assess the child’s current and future needs by building effective relationships with children and families, any current or previous carers, professionals, including health and education professionals and social workers, and others directly involved in their care.

Assess the **impact of trauma**, abuse, neglect, separation, and loss on a child’s development, and how this affects their capacity to build and maintain relationships. Take account of the child’s developmental stage and the likely impact of different transitions, as well as the support the child may need along the way.

Consider the importance of existing **relationships** (including the positive and negative impact of these relationships) including friendships; and the potential benefits of maintaining peer relationships for a child’s sense of identity and belonging

**Encourage** the child to express their views, wishes and feelings about permanence. Listen sensitively to the child to understand their preferences and involve and engage them when making decisions about their future.

**Assess** a potential carer’s abilities to support the child in achieving these goals. Produce child and carer profiles that present an accurate summary of current and likely future needs, as well as a balanced picture of the child including their likes and dislikes, how they behave and their wishes and feelings. Engage in clear, open, and timely communication with carers, which is honest about children’s needs and the impact that any negative early experiences have had on their health and mental health, whilst being positive and solution-focussed about how these might be met.

**Communicate** clearly, openly, and sensitively with children, their families and carers about the planning process for moving into a permanent home or back to their birth home. Ensure that the reasons for any move are communicated in a way that is appropriate to the child’s age and understanding, and that any questions or concerns the child has are listened to.

Support carers to: promote a child’s sense of **identity**, self-worth and belonging; understand how best to share a child’s history and the events that led to previous and current care arrangements - for example, through life story work (in digital or other formats appropriate for the child); and understand how a child’s behaviour is dependent on their experience of both past and present parenting.

Develop high quality **support plans** to support the transition process. Work collaboratively with all parties, children, families, and colleagues to plan and deliver a smooth transition that causes as little distress and disruption to the child as possible. Recognise that for some children a stable transition should take place over a period of time to ensure that the best outcome is achieved.

Where a child is not returning home, assess, plan, and support the appropriate level of **family time** with their birth family based on the individual child’s specific needs. Support children, their brothers and sisters, carers, and the child’s birth family to understand, engage with and contribute to plans for successful family time with each other. Recognise when this is likely to be problematic and provide appropriate support and review. Recognise the significance of a child’s support network to the likely future success of permanence arrangements and take necessary steps to ensure sustained participation of that network in a child’s life.

Utilise a **Support Plan** when a child is permanently placed. Identify the most effective types of support and apply this to the provision of flexible, on-going arrangements. Build a professional network of expertise to help families get the short and long-term support they need. Know what therapy options are available, request a consultation with CAMHS if need be and support families to identify accessible resources that will respond in time.

Draw on **lessons learned** locally on placements which have ended in an unplanned way, whether they be long-term fostering arrangements, SGO or adoption. Hold reflective ‘Learning’ meetings that are non- blaming but focused on collective learning when things haven’t gone as well as we had planned. Record and share this learning. When things do go well, share good practice and seek ways to build on this learning.

# Permanence Planning Meetings (PPMS)

An Initial Permanence Planning Meeting should take place within 10 working days of the Legal Planning meeting decision that the threshold for a child entering Pre-Proceedings or Proceedings has been met. Where a child has entered care outside of the legal process then a PPM should be held prior to the first Child in Care Review. Subsequent Permanence Planning Meetings will take place at least every 6 weeks.

Permanence Planning Meetings 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 home;
* 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

# Devon’s Permanence Panel

This panel, (the terms of Reference for which can be found [here](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/21125/v10-permanence-panel-tor-20231220.docx)) is the forum for considering and confirming matches through long-term fostering or long term residential care. It is very important that the voice of the child or young person is heard here, that carers understand the commitment which they are making and that we in turn commit to supporting the child and their carer to achieve permanence together. Permanence Matters.

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