**EARLY PERMANENCE: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS**

Most parents reading this leaflet will know that the local authority plans for your baby to be looked after by foster carers. The court will be making decisions about your child’s future, and you may be feeling angry, sad or confused. You are probably worried about what is going to happen to your child in care. This leaflet provides information about involving you as a parent in planning for your child’s future.

**Early permanence placements**

An early permanence placement is a way of working with families. The aim is to reduce the number of moves and changes children experience while living away from their parent/s to make sure that your child has the best possible care while his or her long-term future is decided.

Staying in a temporary foster home is not always good for young children, especially if they have to move several more times while waiting for the decisions to be made. This is bound to make it more difficult for a child to settle when the court makes a decision, whether they return to their parent’s care, go to relatives or are later placed for adoption. The use of early permanent placements by your Local Authority offers children a different experience. Our main concern is the well-being of your child and if possible we would like to return him or her to live with you or to be cared for by another relative.

These early permanence families are committed to helping us to reunite parents with their children if this is possible. However, if the court decides that your child cannot return home to you or another member of your family, these dually approved carers are ready to offer the child the security of adoption without facing another move.

**What the Local Authority will offer you as parents**

The Local Authority will complete a pre-birth assessment, they may not carry out a further parenting assessment unless this is ordered by the court. The court will decide what other assessments you need to have, if any, and when reports must be completed so there are no unnecessary delays.

The Local Authority will provide a written agreement setting out contact (family time) arrangements, what you are expected to do and what help is available. The Local Authority will provide opportunities for family time with your child in one of the contact centres with a contact supervisor. The decision about how often you see your child is made by the social work team who will consult with you and the Independent Reviewing Officer and ultimately the contact plan will be agreed at court. The Local Authority will provide opportunities to develop parenting skills (if the assessment recommends this). The Local Authority may also provide help with practical arrangements.

**What could happen to your child?**

The court will decide whether your child can return to you or another member of your family. The decision will be based on the evidence from social workers, the Children’s Guardian, and any other professional who has been asked to do an assessment or give an opinion. You will also be able to tell the court why you think your child should return to your care.

If the court decides that your child cannot return to you or a member of your extended family, then the best plan will be for your child to have the security of adoption by people who are already familiar to you and your child. This would avoid an upsetting move for your child.

You would already know your child has been cared for by the carers and we hope you would feel confident that they would give your child the love and security he or she needs. We hope that you would also feel that the carers respect and understand you and will be able to tell your child later that you love him or her, but that you had problems that made it hard for you to look after them.

**Carers will be specially selected and trained**

Carers will be carefully identified to ensure that they have the right skills to look after your child. Your child will be visited regularly by the Local Authority to ensure that they are meeting your child’s needs and following their care plan.

 You may be able to meet them when they bring your child to contact. They will be able to tell you what is happening to your child and what progress he or she is making.

**The professionals and support available to you**

A social worker will be happy to explain this information in more detail. You may find it helpful to discuss the leaflet with your solicitor.

Adopt South West offers one to one and birth parent support groups. If you would like to access this support, please either speak to your child’s social worker or contact the Adopt South West Advice & Support Line on 0345 155 1076.