

Bradford Children and Families Trust

Permanence Policy and Guidance

1. Introduction

Bradford Children and Families Trust's overarching approach to permanence requires us to consider permanence planning from the very first contact with a child and their family. The goal of permanence planning is to provide a child with a safe, stable environment in which to grow up. Permanence refers to the options available to children about where they live that gives the child a sense of identity, security and commitment. In Bradford we are committed to making sure that for all children, family will be the primary consideration. Only when it is not possible for a child to live with their family should alternative carers be identified.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance sets out the following definition of what permanence should offer a child:

'a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity ... a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond'.

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations' 2015 provides the following definition:

"Permanence is the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. The objective of planning from permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable, and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identify and belonging".

The order by which we secure a legal relationship between the adult and the child is referred to as legal permanence. For example, an Special Guardianship Order, Care Order, Child Arrangements Order or Adoption Order.

Research shows that children thrive best in their own families. When the risk factors they face at home are so overwhelming that it is no longer safe for them to live with their parents then children will do much better if their family connections are maintained. This means that consideration must be given to friends, family, and other connected persons being able to look after the child. If extended family or friends are not a source of safety, then alternative options need to be considered.

Children who grow up experiencing a sense of permanence are more successful in building and maintaining friendships and social connections. Without a sense of

permanence, children are unlikely to settle, and anxiety can develop, which sometimes manifests through behavioural and/or psychological issues later in life. Children who experience fractured attachments often struggle to form and maintain trusting relationships in later life.

A positive experience within a permanent substitute family, where the child experiences a consistent, secure and caring relationship(s) can go a long way in helping to reduce the long-term impact of previous traumatic experiences, enabling the child to develop a sense of trust and increasing self-esteem alongside improving their outcomes.

When social workers are looking at permanence planning, assessments and planning will need to set out the risks and protective factors. The assessment will also need to tell the story of the child, with evidence and recommendation of the further support needed to promote a child's optimal outcomes through their life journey.

Assessments should demonstrate what the identified placement will offer in the long term for the child and show the commitment and positive relationship between the proposed carer and the child. This should include who loves the child and how they will champion their best interests. It should identify how the placement will promote a safe, stable environment, the carer's ability to promote the child's education, health, cultural and religious needs as well as family time between the child and their family and social connections within the community.

All of those with knowledge of the child should be encouraged to share their views so that as full an understanding as possible of the child's experiences and needs can inform the future planning process. It is important to ensure we have the child's voice in both the planning for change (e.g. when undertaking a placement search) in what they see for themselves, and in all care planning and child in care reviews. Where appropriate, children should be part of the decision-making process and should not feel 'done to'.

Where possible brothers and sisters should live together; these relationships are potentially the longest lasting and one of the closest relationships of their lives – connections that have enormous capacity for shared understanding and warmth, and which are expected to last. The relationship between brothers and sisters is important and should be supported to continue when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

When questions are being explored about whether brothers and sisters should live together, an assessment using the [Together or Apart Guidance](#) should be completed to evidence the impact that a potential separation, and the ensuing loss, will have. The assessment should also look at how if brothers and sisters cannot live together, how can they be supported to maintain their relationships. The assessment should use information from a variety of sources including observations and information from carers/parents. It is also important that decisions are carefully explained so that brothers and sisters can understand what has happened and why. The link for the template, assessment tools and further guidance can be found here - [Assessments](#).

Special Guardianship, Child Arrangements Order and Adoption are not simply placement arrangements but also legal arrangements through which Parental

Responsibility is transferred either to the new family or shared between the new family and the child's birth parents. They also confirm the relationships between the child and their family.

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond, and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. Where a child is placed with long term carers other than adopters, it is generally important that the child continues to have access to the family, friends, or community within which he/she was previously brought up and which form part of his/her identity and his/her likely long term support network. For these reasons children should be placed in local families wherever possible. Children should be supported by their care givers and social workers to understand their family history and life story as well as their birth culture, language and heritage. If a child cannot live with a primary carer who shares their race, religion, language or culture then care planning should clearly state how this will be maintained.

2. Why is Permanence Planning Needed?

Permanence planning for a child should be a joint responsibility; where appropriate the social worker should encourage parents to help plan for the child and reflect on what is needed to support them. This will vary in scope and intensity as circumstances change. Support must be based on need and not legal status.

Every effort should be made to avoid delay/drift to ensure children's interests are promoted. This will mean that multiple options are considered to ensure that permanence is achieved without delay. This will be a key consideration for the child's care planning meetings and first and subsequent Children in Care Reviews.

Permanence planning is overseen and tracked in the team and overseen by the permanence panel to make sure that we are proposing is the right option for the child.

Tracking meetings are held in the teams with the service manager and / or court consultant. The purpose of the meeting is to capture regular management oversight of all children who are subject to permanence planning to prevent drift and delay. The tracking meetings support timely and effective decision making. A permanence tracker tool is used to establish/monitor the progress of each child and to allow for data collection.

[Terms of reference permanence panel](#)

3. What Does Permanence Achieve for Children?

- A focus on love and relationships.
- A commitment to family networks and a family first culture, including recognition and support for kinship care.
- A champion for the child who will advocate on their behalf.
- A safe stable permanent home for a child as soon as possible.
- Parents and / or carers committed to providing a lifelong loving family environment.
- Protects the child or young person developmentally.
- Protects primary attachments or creates new loving attachments.
- Preserves cultural and family connection whilst promoting ethnicity and religious heritage.

The Trust is committed to ensure that all children have the right to experience family life, and that wherever it is safe and in line with their needs, this should be within their own birth families.

When a child needs to be looked after, regulation requires that a Permanence Plan is in place for every child by the time of his/her second Child in Care review (i.e. within 16 weeks of coming into care).

4. Options for Permanence

Staying at Home

The first stage within permanence planning is to work with children in need or a child protection plan and their families, to support them to stay together. Staying together offers the best chance of stability. Research shows that keeping a family together has a higher success rate than reunification. This option has to be balanced against the risk of harm to the child.

Working with families to equip them with the knowledge and skills to enable them to raise their children in a loving, healthy, and safe environment offers the best chance of stability. Some families may need additional support in order to make this a realistic option, and the Trust is committed to providing such support.

Early Help Services, Family Group Conferences or Family Meetings, Strengthening Families support, and the effective delivery of the Public Law Outline will play a vital role in supporting families.

Throughout childhood there may be times when a family require support or intervention; however, the Permanence Plan for the child will continue to be to remain at home.

Staying At Home Supported by the Trust

For some children where care proceedings have been initiated a child may remain at home subject to a Supervision Order. This places a child or young person under the supervision of the Trust who are required to advise, help, and befriend the child. This means for these children they will be able to remain in the family home and the allocated social worker will visit regularly.

A Supervision Order may have conditions set out to provide support. For example, it may say that the child should take part in particular activities at specified times.

The Order can only be for one year in the first instance, but the Trust can apply for this to be extended although it must not be for more than three years in all, and not after the person is 18 years old.

The Order can be stopped if any interested parties apply to the Court and the Court agrees, or if a Care Order is made.

Returning Home

For some children returning home after a period in care with Bradford Children and Families Trust will provide the right permanent solution. Good preparation and the proper support for them and their family is vital.

Reviewing the option of returning home should be considered at every child in care review as well as critical points during care planning. Decisions regarding a return home need to be supported by an evidence-based assessment that focuses on the child's needs, balancing the risk and protective factors. The assessment also needs to identify gaps in support or parenting capacity and how these will be managed, to minimise any impact for the child.

Support from the Strengthening Families team is an option in Bradford that should be explored as part of the support plan. Resources (such as housing or access to support) should not be an automatic barrier to prevent children from returning home, when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Permanence Away from Home

Where the outcome of assessment concludes that it is not safe for a child to remain in the family home, the Trust needs to consider alternative forms of permanence. This will ensure that the child has a safe and stable home which provides for their emotional wellbeing, protects them developmentally and supports them into adulthood.

A range of permanence options are available and should be considered. These include **placement with kinship carers, long term fostering, Special Guardianship, a Child Arrangement Order and adoption**. Once the decision has been reached that a child cannot remain or return to the family home the decision of how permanence will be achieved is not hierarchical. The plan should be based on

ensuring that the need for a safe, secure and loving place to live into adulthood is prioritised.

When a permanence plan is agreed for a child, but the arrangement becomes fragile, the child's social worker should initiate the placement stability process and the team around the child should work together to stabilise the arrangement and prevent a breakdown or change of placement for the child.

Decisions regarding the right permanence plan will need to be considered in accordance with the individual needs of the child, set alongside the advantages and disadvantages of each legal route.

Living with Kinship Carers (Connected Persons)

Where the outcome of assessment or enquiries with a child and their family conclude that it is not safe for a child to remain in the family home, every effort must be made for a child to live with a kinship carer. It is very important to establish at an early stage via a Family Meeting or Family Group Conference, which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child. This ensures permanence planning at the earliest opportunity and avoids a child being placed with foster carers unnecessarily. Understanding the child's network and who is available to look after them should be considered from when we first meet the child and their family, to enable contingency planning.

A Kinship Carer is a relative, friend or other person who has a connection with the child. This is also sometimes referred to as Connected Carer or Friends and Family care.

A child can be placed with a Kinship Carer as follows:

- In an emergency situation, a child can be placed subject to Reg 24 for 16 weeks (extended to 24 weeks through Reg 25 agreement). Good practice highlights that these assessments should be jointly completed by the child's social worker and a social worker from the Fostering Service. Regulation 24 assessments may be completed at the point that the child is placed, but good practice is that they should ideally be completed in advance to understand any risks and the carers ability to look after the child. The Head of Service is required to agree these placements before the child is placed.
- All Kinship Carers should have a Kinship Assessment and be approved at Fostering Panel.

In some circumstances, children will be living with Kinship Carers in unregulated arrangements.

Viability assessments for kinship should be undertaken jointly with the kinship assessment team.

Long Term Foster Care

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 provide a definition of a long-term foster placement which is:

- The child's plan for permanence is foster care;
- The foster carer has agreed to look after the child until they cease to be in care; and
- The child's responsible authority has confirmed the arrangement to the foster carer, the child, and their birth parents.

This option of permanence is particularly useful for older children who have retained strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the formality of adoption. It also offers the option for foster carers to offer Staying Put arrangements which provides a home for our children beyond 18.

Long term fostering has continued advantages as a permanence plan as it can enable continued support to the child and foster family in placement which is regularly reviewed to ensure that the child's needs are been met.

For children living in long term foster care, the option of the carer applying for a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order needs to be considered as part of their permanence planning, as this provides a sense of legal permanence and gives the young person a further sense of belonging. It reiterates the commitment from the carer to the child and it also provides the carer with shared parental responsibility.

Special Guardianship Orders

When a child needs to live permanently away from their parents and the carer would like legal responsibility for the child, then a Special Guardianship Order can be applied for. This will limit the birth parent's rights and provide a sense of permanence but will not end the relationship with the birth family.

A Special Guardianship Order will expire when the child reaches his/her 18th birthday, however any assessment should explore the carer's longer-term commitment to supporting the child post-eighteen as he/she moves on into his/her adult life.

The following persons may apply for a Special Guardianship Order:

- a. Any legal guardian of the child/young person.
- b. A local authority foster carer with whom the child/young person has lived for at least one year immediately preceding the application.
- c. Anyone who is named in a Child Arrangements Order as a person with whom the child is to live.
- d. Anyone with whom the child/young person has lived for 3 out of the last 5 years.
- e. Where the child/young person is subject of a Care Order, any person who has the consent of the local authority.

- f. Anyone who has the consent of all those who hold parental responsibility for the child/young person e.g. anyone, including the child/young person, who has the leave of the court to apply.

Special Guardians are granted parental responsibility for the child and although this will be shared with the child's birth parent(s), the Special Guardian(s) will have the legal right to make all day-to-day arrangements for the child. The parent(s) will still have to be consulted and their consent is required for big decisions such as a change of name and going abroad for more than 3 months.

Special Guardians may be supported financially or otherwise by the Trust and have the right to request an assessment of need for support services at any time after the Order is made. Prior to the making of the Special Guardianship Order (SGO), the child's social worker should develop a good quality SGO Support Plan that considers the current and future needs of the child. Support and advice is available from the post SGO team. [SGO Policy](#)

Child Arrangements Order

Child Arrangements Orders were introduced in April 2014 by the Children and Families Act 2014 (which amended section 8 Children Act 1989). They replace Contact Orders and Residence Orders. Child Arrangement Orders are private law orders and cannot be made to the Trust.

A Child Arrangements Order is a court order relating to who the child shall live with and / or who they should spend time with.

The granting of a Child Arrangement Order to someone automatically gives the carer parental responsibility for the child they are looking after. Parental Responsibility obtained as a result of a Child Arrangements Order will continue until the order ceases. As with a Special Guardianship Order the rights of birth parents are not removed but they are limited as to how they exercise these.

A Child Arrangements Order lasts until the child is 16 or 18 if the circumstances of the case are exceptional and the court has ordered that it continue for longer.

A Child Arrangements Order prevents:

- Changing the registered name of the child;
- Removing the child from the UK (for more than 1 month);
- Consenting to the child's adoption without the agreement of everyone with Parental Responsibility.

However, as with a Special Guardianship Order, a Child Arrangements Order will provide a sense of permanence. Financial assistance may be given to those carers who have been granted a Child Arrangements Order. This would need agreement from the relevant Head of Service.

Residential Care

For almost all children, the best place for them to grow up is within a family home. However, for a very few children and young people, due their needs, living in a residential children's home will be the right plan.

Residential care should very rarely be a permanence option; it may be a stepping stone as part of the child's journey to achieve permanence.

Any residential option agreed should be able to work intensively with the child to prepare him/her for a return to family-based care in the longer-term, whether this is with one or both of his/her birth parents, with an extended family member(s) or with a foster carer(s). All planning should be agreed and reviewed as part of the child in care review to ensure that all services are working collaboratively to achieve the child's care plan. It is vital that children have good multiagency assessments, and that permanence planning is driven by the assessment, not the children's home.

Staying Put

Under the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, Planning Transition into Adulthood for Care Leavers Guidance and Government Staying Put Guidance (2013), the Trust must provide information about extending placements beyond the age of 18. These are known as Staying Put arrangements. The Trust has an up-to-date Staying Put policy and actively encourages and supports young people to remain with their carers beyond the age of 18.

Discussion should start with the young person and his/her foster carer(s) regarding the option of Staying Put when arrangements are made to ratify the fostering arrangement as long term or as early as possible, ideally before the young person reaches the age of 16.

Where a child/young person is formally matched with his/her foster carer(s) on a long term/permanent fostering basis, the potential for a Staying Put arrangement should be discussed as part of the matching and Panel process regardless of the age of the child/young person on placement.

If this has not already been done, the first CLA review following the child's 16th birthday must consider whether a Staying Put arrangement should be an option. This will entail assessing the implications for both the young person and the foster carer(s).

[Staying Put Policy](#)

Independent Living

From October 2023, all providers of supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds are required to register with Ofsted. Therefore, if a child of this age is not living with a registered provider, or in a regulated placement, then their arrangement should be considered as 'unregulated' and the guidance below should be followed.

Unregistered and Unregulated Placements

All children who are not in an Ofsted registered or regulated provision, are in an 'unlawful' placement.

- Unregistered placements refers to children living in a provision that is not Ofsted registered.
- Unregulated placements refers to children living with Kinship Carers where the arrangements is not approved, or children who live in an unregulated (with Ofsted) children's home.
- All children who live in unregulated or unregistered children's homes are reviewed regularly by the Assistant Director to ensure that permanence planning continues and is prioritised.
- Children who live in other unregulated arrangements, such as unregulated kinships arrangements, should have weekly oversight from senior leaders.

[Unregulated Placements Guidance](#)

Adoption

When the assessment has concluded that children cannot be returned to their birth family or connected carers, adoption should be considered as the permanence plan to provide stability and consistency.

An Adoption Order transfers Parental Responsibility for the child from birth parents and others who had Parental Responsibility, including the Trust, permanently and solely to the Adopter(s).

Research strongly supports adoption as a primary consideration and as a main factor contributing to the stability of children, especially for those aged under four years who cannot be reunified with their birth parent(s) or provided with permanent care by a member of their extended family.

Bradford Children and Families Trust is ambitious in its pursuit of adoptive placements for children in need of permanent families. To this end, adoption should always be considered for all children who cannot return to the permanent care of their parents or their wider family/friends network. Adoption will also in some cases be the appropriate permanence plan for older children. All care planning must be fully compliant with relevant case law and guidance including 'Re BS', with a balance sheet being provided in all instances. One Adoption West Yorkshire are commissioned to provide adoption activities including the assessment and approval of adopters, adoption family finding and adoption support.

[Adoption Guidance](#)

5. Family Time

Family time is the term used for opportunities for children to stay in touch with their family, friends and other people who are important to them, including brothers and sisters. Family time is there to create positive experiences for children, nurturing their connections with those who are important to the child. This is essential for the child's sense of identity and belonging.

As part of permanence planning, Bradford Children and Families Trust have a duty to promote family time where it is safe to do so and as set out in their care plan.

Family time can be either direct or indirect. It is important that when using these terms, the plan is clear about what this means. Direct family time is where the child spends time face to face with the important people in their lives. Indirect family time includes phone calls, face time, whatsapp video calls, letters, emails, birthday cards as well as the exchange of information at key events for the child such as Christmas, Eid or Easter.

Family time can be unsupervised, facilitated or supervised –

- Unsupervised family time means that the family time takes place with no-one else there to facilitate, support or supervise the session.
- Facilitated family time is where some support is provided for the family time such as a room in a Contact Centre or a Children's Centre; and where possible, staff might greet everyone beforehand and pop in to ask if anything is needed. This would need to have been agreed with the setting prior to arranging the booking of the room.
- Supervised family time involves someone who is allocated to be present throughout the whole session and a written record is kept. This sometimes happens because information about the parent(s) in contact sessions is needed to inform court proceedings. Another reason for supervising family time is for the child's safety and welfare.

Family Time should take place, unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare. Family time must always be for the benefit of the child and not the parent, relative or friend.

Family time arrangements should be reviewed as part of the child in care review.

For children with plans of adoption, careful thought and planning needs to be given to post adoption family time. This should be completed in consultation with One Adoption West Yorkshire to ensure that arrangements are supported by best practice and current guidance.

[Family Time with Parents/Adults and Siblings](#)

6. Life story Work

Life story work is an important part of permanence planning for all our children as it supports children to understand their life story and journey through the decisions that have been made about their life. Many people will contribute to this work including the birth family and other people who have been part of the child's life including carers, teachers and friends. Using direct work, play, stories and creative approaches, opportunities can be created to support the child to explore their past, learning more about their family and help understand the decisions that have been made about where they are living and who they are spending time with.

Life Story Work is essential for children who grow up outside of their birth family. Most children can get an understanding of their background and their identity through family conversations and photo albums. For children who no longer live with their birth family, there are greater barriers to accessing this information and therefore they can be more unanswered questions. These children have often experienced traumatic events and loss. These events are emotionally complex and can be hard to understand, which can impact the child's sense of personal identity.

Life story work should start at the very beginning of involvement/intervention with children, for example through genograms, photos and recording of significant events – this could be developmental events such as a child's first steps, or big changes such as a child moving house or moving to an alternative care giver. When a child first becomes looked after, a clear plan for life story work should be established and should help the child to understand their circumstances and should be a source of comfort and support. Consideration should also be given to helping children understand their life story when they're older and want to know more detail, such as a later life letter or life story book. Life story work is never an isolated incident, it should be revisited consistently through a child's life to help them understand the decisions made about them, in an age-appropriate way.

[Life Story Policy](#)

Appendix 1: Permanence Options Checklist of Considerations

Child Arrangements Orders/Special Guardianship	Adoption	Long Term Fostering
Child needs the security of a legally defined placement with alternative carers but does not require a lifelong commitment involving a change of identity.	Child's primary need is to belong to a family who will make a lifelong commitment.	Primary need is for a stable, loving family environment whilst there is still a significant level of continued involvement with the birth family.
Child's relation, foster or other carer needs to exercise day to day parental responsibility and is prepared to do so as a lifelong commitment.	Child's birth parents are not able or not willing to share parental responsibility in order to meet their child's needs, even though there may be contact.	Child has a clear sense of identity with the birth family, whilst needing to be looked after away from home.
There is no need for continuing monitoring and review by the Local Authority, although support services may still need to be arranged.	Child needs an opportunity to develop a new sense of identity whilst being supported to maintain or develop a healthy understanding of their past.	There is need for continuing oversight and monitoring of the child's developmental progress.
Child has a strong attachment to the alternative carers and legally defined permanence is assessed as a positive contribution to their sense of belonging and security.	Child expresses a wish to be adopted.	Birth parents are able and willing to exercise a degree of parental responsibility.