

## Enfield Permanence Guidance



**Permanence is the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework 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.**

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## **Introduction**

Securing suitable, permanent arrangements for children in a timely manner is a key priority for Enfield Children's Services. This principle is at the forefront of all our work and runs through all aspects of the 'child's journey' through our services.

This guidance sets out the strategic and operational framework within which, planning for permanence will take place. The guidance will be regularly reviewed to allow emerging developments at national level to be addressed and will ensure an appropriate level of monitoring and scrutiny.

All children need security and stability to support them to reach their potential, children who are unable to live with their parents will have experienced a significant amount of instability before being accommodated. It is therefore important that all plans for their care are effective, flexible and child focussed with permanency planning at the forefront from the point of referral.

There are several processes and procedures in place to assist in the care planning for children who are in care, or on the brink of care, and all require a 'joined up' approach to care planning.

## **Aim of this Guidance**

Enfield is committed to being the best Corporate Parent it can be, seeking the same outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers as any good parent would want for their own children.

This guidance aims to set out a clear framework to ensure that we meet the individual permanence needs of every child and their family in a timely way.

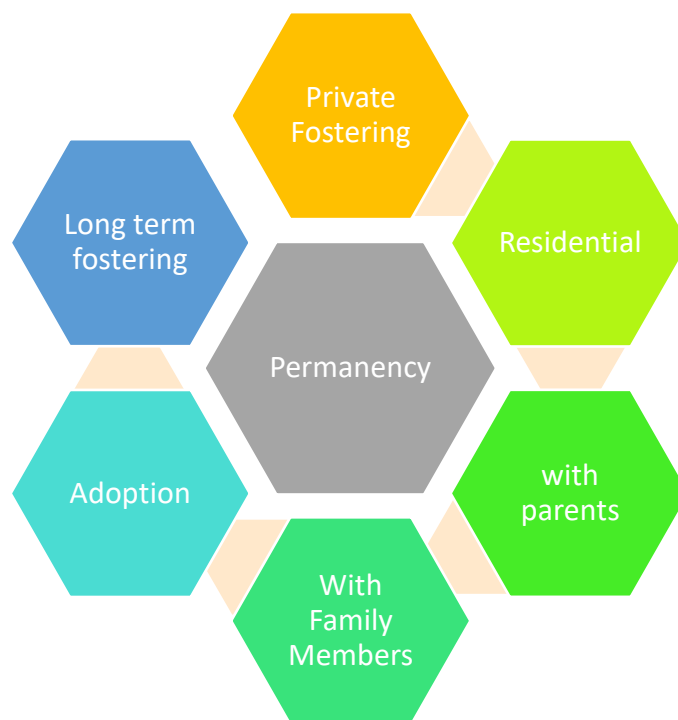
## **What is Permanence?**

Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical, and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, and identity. This can only be achieved if there is proactive care planning from an early stage, to ensure that a thorough analysis of each possible plan is considered.

- Legal – permanence options include remaining safely with birth parents, kinship care ( living with extended family members or friends), long-term fostering, and adoption. There are a range of legal arrangements providing the appropriate future level of safeguarding depending on individual circumstances. These include Special Guardianship Orders, Care Orders, Supervision Orders and Child Arrangement Orders.

- Psychological - when the child feels attached to an adult who provides a stable, loving, and secure relationship.
- Physical or environmental - a stable and loving home environment within a familiar neighbourhood and community where the child's identity needs are met.

### **Options for Permanence**



There are a number of ways which permanency can be achieved for children which should be explored thoroughly. Consideration should be given to the options available and how these will support the child throughout their minority.

### **Care Planning Principles**

- Pre proceedings work and early intervention services are focused on supporting children to remain in their families wherever possible. It is important that we use

a range of interventions with children and their families, as people find different types of support helpful. The use of local resources and the Public Law Outline (PLO) process should be considered together with Family Group Conferences.

- When working with children and young people on the brink of care in the pre-proceedings phase, all options for permanence should be considered to ensure that all children have a secure, stable, and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.
- Proactive permanence planning is embedded from an early stage and throughout; to ensure that a thorough analysis of each possible plan is considered. Any change in circumstance should be captured and addressed and decision making recorded on the child's file.
- Permanence planning for a Looked After Child can be achieved in several ways, such as reunification with birth parent(s), family and friends care, foster care or special guardianship arrangements, or adoption. It is important to remember that foster care is a long-term option for some children and in some situations can be combined with a residential school arrangement.
- Both long and short-term placements will be made with a long-term view, and with the aim of providing a high-quality experience of 'upbringing' throughout the child's stay. Placement stability must be a focus with all placements.
- There is a clear identification and understanding of a child's needs which are taken into consideration in making permanent plans. This includes completing high quality life story work with the child or young person and ensuring that their wishes and feelings are recorded and that they understand their life story.
- Direct work with the child is essential to enable a child to understand the reasons for the decisions being made and helping them to share their views.

### **Pre –proceedings**

Permanency should be considered as early as possible for all children not only for very young babies and children. Initially it is at the **legal planning meeting**, where decisions will be made about next steps within a legal framework. If there is a decision to initiate the Public Law Outline (PLO), then consideration should be given to the options available.

A **permanency planning meeting** should be held (a) during the PLO process at least by the review stage where the decision is to continue with the PLO, and (b) where children are accommodated via Section 20, as early as the 1st LAC review but no later

than the 2nd LAC review (c) where unborn babies are subject to a pre-birth plan. This is a multi-disciplinary meeting with the aim of beginning to plan for future placement, focussing on the child's needs and consider all the options.

Enfield have an internal Family Group Conference (FGC) Service, independent FGC chairs meet with the family members and the key professionals to look at how the family can be supported to meet the needs of the children.

These meetings are not only useful in considering who in the family may be able to care for the child if the parents are not able to, but also to look at the support that the family members can give the parent/s to enable the child/ren to remain at home. Full consultation with family and community networks should be undertaken to establish the child's attachments and supports.

At this point it is also important to gather information about the people who are important to the child both within and outside of the birth family.

### **Family Placements**

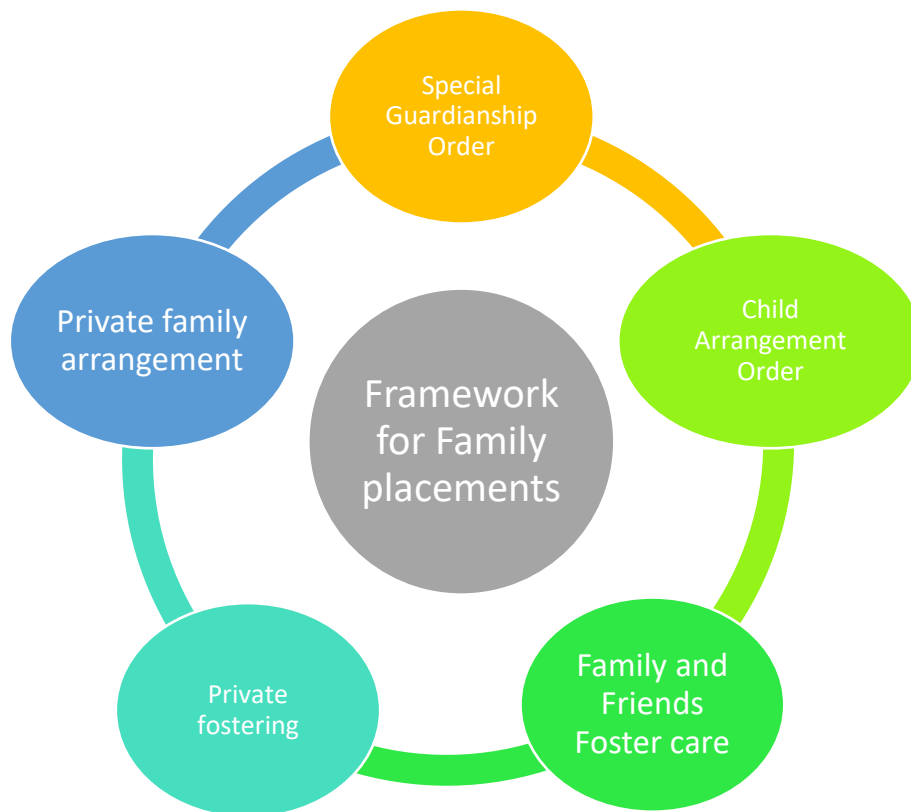
Outcomes are positive for most children living in kinship care, and considerably better than for children in unrelated foster care, e.g., the children are more securely attached to their carers, feel that they belong with them, and are confident they will be staying. There should be exploration of potential family members who may be able to care for the child/ren as family carer's, gathering details of family members early will prevent delay and enable further discussions to take place. It is important that families understand that there are different ways that they can care for their relative and what is involved in being assessed as well as the involvement they will have with professionals following the assessment.

There will be an initial viability to identify if the placement with the relative or friend can be progressed, it is important that the assessment is thorough and is undertaken in accordance with the practice guidance on viabilities.

### [Final PGN Viability](#)

### **Family Rights Group Guidance.**

<https://frg.org.uk/product/initial-family-and-friends-care-assessment-a-good-practice-guide/>



Viability assessments should be completed, whilst other support is being provided this will enable children to be placed within the family if it becomes necessary and avoid delay in making family placements.

Positive viability assessments can be used to place a child under Regulation 24 of the Children Act 1989, whilst a family and friends or special guardianship assessment is undertaken. A family placement will be supported by the fostering team alongside the children's social worker and regulated by the Fostering Panel initially for 16 weeks and then as a Regulation 25 for an additional 8 weeks. If the placement is continuing beyond this due to the court process, then the director of children's Services will need to give approval as the placement will be unregulated.

### **During proceedings**

Good collaborative planning, pre-proceedings, allows a strong and coherent, local authority care plan to be presented in court and guards against plans being managed within court timescales rather than the child's timescales. Systems are in place to allow for continuous focus on the permanence plan, as once all parties are engaged with the court process new information can emerge, and it may be necessary to amend the initial plan.

Regular permanency planning meetings should be held at the beginning of proceedings if they have not already begun, review meetings should be undertaken every 6-8 weeks or as agreed by the professional network.

The meetings should include the children's guardian (GAL), the independent reviewing officer (IRO) and the child's professional network. Changes to the care plan are agreed and finalised in the child's LAC review.

When considering the various options for a child, a balancing exercise should be woven into the discussions. Formal family finding cannot begin until a Placement Order has been granted in the case of adoption however, parallel planning must begin during proceedings if placement outside the family is a potential outcome; the link social worker from the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt London North (ALN) should be invited to permanency planning meetings to give a view on adoption as a possible outcome. Referrals to the RAA should be completed as soon as adoption is identified as a potential parallel plan, so that a family finder can be allocated as part of the parallel planning.

The online database 'Link Maker' is a system already in place for matching the child's profile with a potentially suitable family. This can be used with an anonymous profile when the child has had a plan of adoption agreed by the ADM, even if the case is still in court proceedings pending a decision on granting of the Placement Order.

### **Post proceedings**

Following the conclusion of court proceedings, and the granting of care and/or placement orders, ongoing assessment, support, and planning continues to inform plans for the stability and security for the child.

Review permanency planning meetings and/or family finding meetings must continue as a multi-disciplinary forum to minimise any drift for the child and ensure that child centred plans for permanency are made. These meetings should be held on a regular basis at least every 8 weeks until the child is living in a permanent placement. The meeting should include all the relevant professionals, such as the allocated worker the case manager, independent reviewing officer, and supervising social worker.

For children where adoption is the care plan, close liaison with the Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt London North) should continue, for profiles to be made live as soon as a Placement Order is made by the Court.

Following on from proceedings the independent reviewing officer must be informed and involved in the formulation of the permanence plan. This is to ensure there is no drift for the child/ren, it may be that an adoptive placement has not been identified despite family finding and the decision is made to discharge the Placement Order and to progress an alternative plan of long-term fostering. Alternatively following a period



of foster care, a parent may apply to the court to discharge the care order or request a new assessment due to changes to their circumstances.

Flexibility is required in establishing the permanence plan; it is important to observe the changes in the child's relationships, behaviour, and placement, and to use this as the basis of analysis and thinking about maintaining a permanent placement.

Careful consideration of contact arrangements, and the child's changing needs, are essential in establishing successful permanency, Family time can be critical in supporting a child to remain in the foster placement.

## **5. Child/ren's Participation in Permanence**

The experience of the child must inform the permanence and care planning process. There is an expectation that when planning for alternative care, careful consideration will be given to both listening to the child/ young person's views and concerns and supporting the child's sense of identity and their connecting past. Time should be taken to explain plans and to communicate with the young person about what is happening.

The professional meetings are an opportunity to hear the social workers and other professionals understanding of the child or young person's views.

Life story work is well established within adoption placements but should be completed with all children where permanence planning is undertaken and is also relevant when an extended family solution is identified. The later life letter is also an opportunity to ensure that the child/young person has access to their history.

## **6. Siblings**

Careful consideration must be given at an early stage, and throughout the planning stage, about whether siblings should be placed together or separately. Each child's individual needs require assessment, but also within the context of their sibling relationships. Some children who have suffered significant trauma will require considerable support to deal with their experiences. Where children are to be placed separately consideration will need to be given about the amount and frequency of sibling contact. CAMHS/Heart input is available when considering the emotional impact on the child(ren). The decision to separate siblings would be based on a Sibling Together or Apart assessment, which are completed in-house by the LAC social worker with consultation from CAMHS.

## **Supporting permanent placements**

Whatever placement is made, there are a range of services available:

- The dedicated Heart Team has CAMHS and education professionals available for Looked After Children and those children who have previously been looked

after and who are now subject to Special Guardianship Orders and Adoption Orders.

- Post adoption support through the regional adoption team.
- Post special guardianship support
- Support for children previously Looked After by the Local Authority to access additional support at school.
- Foster carers are offered support as part of their approval; for instance, an annual training programme, their supervising social worker, access to the therapeutic parenting course (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) and the 'instep' programme.

Birth parents should be offered access to a range of services such as relevant adult services i.e., mental health or drug and alcohol as well as any charitable or Local Authority specialist services for parents who have had children removed from their care. This will enable them to work towards addressing the concerns which have led to social work intervention and ultimately in their children being removed from their care.

## **Contact**

If a child is placed away from their birth family, there will need to be an agreement about the nature and frequency of contact with relatives including their parents and siblings. Good contact arrangements are central to placement stability. Contact between the child and his/her family must be child-focused, supported, managed, and reviewed in line with the needs of the child's need for permanency and stability.

Where children remain in foster care it is essential that contact arrangements develop in line with the child's age and understanding. Wherever possible and safe to do so, children should be supported to have unsupervised contact with their birth family particularly extended family.

Just because a family member had a negative viability as a long-term carer, they may be able to offer to care for the child for a day or overnight, subject to assessment or to supervise contact with a birth parent.

## **Conclusion**

Drift and delay in achieving permanence for children and young people causes unnecessary harm. Children need to grow up in a secure environment, with a parent or carer committed to a lifelong nurturing relationship, this will support children to make the transition to adulthood fully equipped to reach their full potential.

Permanency protects the child developmentally and creates new attachments. Early permanency planning is essential for all Looked After children to avoid drift and ensure they can reach their full potential from a safe and secure base.

It is the aim of Enfield's Permanence Guidance to reinforce a sense of urgency around permanence planning and to give guidance to all professionals involved in working together to achieve the shared goal of permanence for our Looked After Children.

Karen Alderton

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