
Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services and Early Help

Permanence Strategy

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Date: 25th June 2018

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1.1 Introduction

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations sets out the clear expectation that Local Authorities should, wherever necessary, secure permanent care arrangements for children in their care. This has been strengthened in the revised regulations regarding achieving permanence from the day a child becomes looked after (Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010).

This Permanence Strategy Policy, procedure and guidance document, is underpinned by our service standards, values and principles. These are integral to achieving permanency for our children and young people on the edge of care or in care.

1.2 Our Children's Services Standards, Vision & Principles

The following Service standards, values and principles have been extracted from our Children's Services Quality Assurance Framework as they are integral to the implementation of this strategy.

1.3 Our Service Objectives

Putting our children and young people first:

- Promoting and protecting the interest of service users and carers
- Communicate appropriately and effectively
- Work within the limits of their (service users and carers) knowledge and skills
- Respect confidentiality
- Manage risk appropriately

1.4 Our overarching service principles

- We will always aim to meet the needs of children and young people and their families at the earliest stage, either through the provision of early help or where necessary, intervention from Safeguarding Services.
- Children are best cared for by their families and in situations where this cannot be achieved safely, they need to be looked after in safe and stable placements.
- Our practitioners act as a resource for children and young people and their families, helping parents to make positive changes. To do this they need to have professional curiosity and take responsibility for self-development and use supervision effectively.
- In our assessments and practice we aim to understand and improve the child's lived experience.

- Work is carried out in partnership with parents and carers to enable them to meet their responsibilities and achieve best outcomes.
- Children are involved in decisions that affect them.
- In all our work, we maintain an awareness of equal opportunities and the impact of discrimination.
- We work closely with other agencies to improve support that is offered to children, young people and their families.
- Work with children and families is undertaken within the legislative framework and makes use of best practice
- Our records are accurate, complete and demonstrate the child's story.
- Work with children is managed and supervised to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- We treat children, families and our working partners with courtesy and respect.

1.5 What this means in practice

Every child and young person we work with has a good quality assessment which they have been involved with.

- Every child and young person we work with has a plan which is SMART and written in plain language.
- Every child and young person we work with is seen regularly with clear purpose to visits.
- Every child and young person we work with will have their voice visible in assessments, plans and review.

2 Permanency Strategy

2.1 Permanency Strategy - Purpose

This strategy outlines our commitment to ensuring that children and young people at risk or who come into our care are supported through our involvement and activities to achieve secure, stable and loving homes that support them through childhood and beyond.

Our overall goal is that permanence planning and practice is not seen as an additional process; but is central to our care planning practice.

The intention of our permanency strategy is to achieve permanency for children and young people in a timely way. Through the most appropriate preventative and or legal placement option to meet their needs. Permanency options include:

- Remaining with or returning to the care of their birth family
- Permanent placement with family or friends carers
- Adoption
- Early permanence placements/fostering for adoption
- Special Guardianship (SGO)
- Child Arrangements Orders
- Long Term Foster Care
- Residential Care

This Permanency document should be read in conjunction with the Permanence Policy, Procedures & Guidance document. Other core documents identified to assist our practitioners to explore options for permanency at every stage of our involvement with children, young people, their families and their carers.

2.2 What is permanency for children and young people and what does it achieve?

Permanency is the long term plan for a child or young person's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption.

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (DfE 2015) defines the objective of planning for permanence as:

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.

Permanency depends on securing the right placement for the right child at the right time. Children's experiences within the system vary considerably, depending on factors including age, ethnicity and reasons for placement. What matters is quality and relationships. To provide individual solutions for individual children, we not only need to support routes to legal permanence, but to place equal value on other ways of achieving permanence. This would support for children and families at the 'edges of care', as well as through permanent return to birth parents and permanence in shared or full-time care. All options for the child or young person need to be conceptualised with a common understanding and an objective of permanence.

Achieving permanence for a child or young person needs to be a key consideration from the day they become looked-after. The permanence planning process, informed by multi-agency contributions, will identify which permanence option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child; taking account of his/her wishes and feelings.

This will mean that active twin or triple track planning where there is serious doubt about the viability of the child being able to remain with or return to his/her birth family, and for children and young people on the edge of care.

2.3 What Does Permanency Achieve for Children?

It has long been recognised that a sense of stability, identity and belonging is needed for children and young people to be able to be achieve their individual needs. Permanency helps enable this by:

- Providing a safe stable permanent home for the child as soon as possible
- Supporting parents and/or carers committed to providing a lifelong loving family environment
- Protecting the child or young person developmentally
- Protecting primary attachments, or creates new attachments
- Preserving cultural and family connection
- Taking into account the wishes and feelings of the child
- Preserving the child or young person's links with their racial, cultural and religious heritage

2.4 Our Objectives to achieve permanency for our children and young people at risk of care or in care:

1. We will ensure that children and young people achieve permanence without delay.

By the second Looked After Review every child or young person will have an agreed written Permanence Plan in accordance with the Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and the Children Act 2004.

2. We will ensure that our services, our models of assessment, our plans and the support we provide to achieve permanency will be good quality and based upon evidence based research and best practice.

3. We will support children and young people to remain living safely with their families wherever possible.

Where it is safe for our children and young people to remain with their immediate birth family or extended family members we will support parents and family members to maintain this. Where family pressures impact upon the ability of parents to provide continuity of care to their children and young people, we will through our Early Help Services provide targeted provision to help maintain children and young people within their families.

To secure permanence through return to birth parents, we will develop child and family-centred approaches to placement, in order to:

- Achieve secure change in the family issues that led to the child or young person coming into care.
- Support relationships between children and young people in care and their birth parents and wider family and friend networks during placement and after return home.

4. Where children and young people cannot live safely on a temporary or permanent basis with their parent/s we will always explore and consider whether another family member or friend would be suitable to provide safe care and support to them.

Family and Friends Carers will be assessed in relation to their suitability and ability to meet the child or young person's needs. This policy objective is central in our strategy to support children and young people to maintain their links with birth family where this is safe and appropriate.

5. We will make alternative care arrangements for children/young people who are not able to live safely within their family and friends network.

Care planning will focus on matching children and young people into permanent placements where they can feel safe, happy and well cared for.

6. We will hold children and young people's requirements and views paramount in considering permanence, as fully as their age and understanding allows.

We will ensure that children and young people are involved and consulted about their options for permanency. We will consult with children sensitively and in ways that are appropriate to age and understanding throughout the care planning process. Their wishes and feelings will be properly taken into account in relation to decisions about their care. We will however, ensure that the burden of decision-making does not fall inappropriately upon them.

7. We will maintain and support contact for children and young people looked after with their families and people who are important to them.

We will promote contact where this is in the best interest of the child or young person. Contact arrangement will be reviewed to ensure that they remain in the best interest for the child.

8. We will place children and young people in homes which meet their ethnicity, cultural, religious and language needs.

Wherever possible this will be achieved through placement with culturally matched carers. Where this is not possible we will ensure that the child or young person's carers are able to respond to these specific needs.

9. We will aim wherever possible to keep siblings together where this is consistent with children's welfare and best interests.

However in exceptional circumstances there are some sibling groups where the needs of specific children require separate permanency plans. Where this is the case the role of the Permanency Panel is critical in providing recommendations and decisions in respect of achieving permanency; based on robust 'together/apart' assessments. In these cases we will ensure that their care givers ensure good quality contact between siblings where that is in their best interests.

Where sibling groups come into emergency care, a meeting will be convened by the Team Manager to ascertain information as to whether siblings should be placed separately or remain together. If siblings are placed separately in an emergency, a further meeting is required within one week to explore reuniting siblings who may be separated or to commence separate or apart assessments.

10. We will ensure that our plans for permanency consider the additional support needs of children with disabilities.

All children in care requiring a permanence plan will be assessed to identify any ongoing support needs and how these will be met and reviewed and responded to day to day and in the long term up to the age of 25 years.

11. We will make sure children and young people are consulted and able to make complaints and receive advocacy support.

We aim to provide a good service to all our children and young people whatever their needs and requirements are. Children and young people who are unhappy with their plans for permanency will have an opportunity to discuss their views with their Social Worker and/or the Team Manager responsible for them. Children & young people in care or in Private Fostering arrangements can obtain support in relation to their concerns about their permanency options/plans from the Children's Rights & Representation Team. Children & young people in care may also contact their Independent Reviewing Officer.

2.5 Options for Permanence

Most children will have their need for stability and nurturing met by their extended family or close family members and will not require support from, or come to the attention of, Local Authority Children's Services.

Our policy is clear that where appropriate permanency should be secured with family or connected people without the need for children/young people to become looked after by our Local Authority. We will aim to provide assistance to families to help them to maintain the care of their children wherever it is in their child's best interests. This may involve referral to our Early Help Services or Family Solutions Team to support families to identify the most appropriate option for the child or young person.

This strategy, aims to 'join up' our care planning processes by combining the expertise within our Early Help, Family Solutions, Child Protection and Family Support Teams, Disabled Children's Teams, Children in Care and Leaving Care Teams with the knowledge and experience of our Fostering and Adoption Services.

This supports our children, young people and their families in reducing duplication and delay. Whilst promoting timely communication between all staff involved.

Our practice oversight of these arrangements will primarily be through our Permanency Panel and our Strategic oversight through our tracking panel.

3.0 Service Roles & Responsibilities in contributing to the Achievement of Permanence

3.1 Early Help & Family Solutions

Our strategy to support children and young people to remain with their families or to be cared for by their families extended network will be supported by our Early Help & Family Solutions Services.

Our Early Help and Family Solutions Teams' primary focus is to ensure that wherever possible children and young people have the chance to grow up in their family environment. This will be achieved by offering a family based intervention that is timely and effective in keeping families together where it is safe and reasonable to do so it will help prevent children and young people entering into the care of the Local Authority. The service area also provides support to children and families where it has been identified as safe for a child to return home, following a period of time of being accommodated by the Local Authority and provides support to ensure the safe transition from a residential setting to foster families or home if it is considered safe to do so.

The service arranges and facilitates Family Group Conferences to help families support the needs of their child either with birth parents or with other members of the extended family. The team provides support to children and young people and their families, where there is a plan for children and young people to return home from specific placements. And where appropriate – maintain contact between children & young people in care, who may return to their families at a future date.

Family Solutions are able to convene family meetings to either:

- Support families to identify and develop their own support systems.
- Resolve issues between family members which may result in specific ongoing stressors and crises.
- Support families to identify alternative care arrangements for a child or young person where children and young people can no longer live with their birth families.

3.2 Disabled Children's Services

Provide a specialist service/intervention for children with a disability or complex needs. The team undertake assessments of children and young people with disabilities and where the criteria for service provision is met provide support to their families. Where a need for

additional support has been identified as a result of disability. The Disabled Children's Team and Inclusion and Support Team work with the family support planning through the provision of Short Breaks as detailed within Short Break statutory guidance.

Where needs of children and young people are more complex the Disabled Children's Team undertake integrated joint assessments with Health providers, Education and Adult Services to achieve joint care and support plans. The team leads on the case management of children in care working closely with special needs schools, residential providers, fostering services, and the Virtual School Head for looked after children, CAMHs Learning Disabilities Service, the Joint Adoption Service and external care providers to identify and provide service to support children and young people achieve permanence.

3.3 Child Protection and Family Support Services

- Where children and young people are in need of protection and family support our aim will be to ensure that families are able to recognise and take active steps to protect and support their children and young people to remain within their families, where this has been assessed and determined as appropriate.
- Where we have mutually agreed with a parent/s to accommodate a child or young person, we will be seeking in many cases to develop plans for family reunification. In these instances we will assess the suitability of extended family members or others to care for them in the first instance.
- Where children and young peoples have entered care as a result of Child Protection concerns which result in formal Child Care Proceedings. We will consider the most appropriate options for permanence. In the first instance we will consider and assess the suitability of extended family members to provide safety and care. Thus, avoid the need for the child or young person to remain within the care of the Local Authority.
- Where children and young people's needs have been assessed and there are no suitable appropriate options within the family or others. Our Brokerage and Fostering service explore family finding and matching for long term placements.

- **Child Arrangement Orders**

Where children and young people are unable to remain with their birth families, consideration will be given to whether alternative care may be provided by an alternative family member/someone within the network of the family. Where our explorations with the family and our direct discussions and background checks with the

proposed individuals are positive we will proceed to full Child Arrangement order assessment (CPFS).

- **Parenting Assessments** are undertaken by the Parenting Assessment Team where children are deemed in need of support, in need of protection, where work is being completed under the Public Law Outline or where care proceedings have been issued and the Court directs a Parenting Assessment. The Parenting Assessment Team is also responsible for undertaking pre-birth assessments where the criteria for such assessment is met at the point of referral. Where there is a plan for children in care to be placed with their parents – **Placement with Parents Policies and Procedures** must be followed by Social Workers and their managers to assess and obtain authorisation from the Assistant Director Children’s Safeguarding and Specialist Services.

3.4 Children in Care and Leaving Care

- This service will be responsible for supporting permanence planning and provision for children and young people where the plan is for alternative care arrangements.
- The team’s focus will be to ensure that children and young people looked after have their needs and support clearly evidenced to inform their needs for long term. Substitute care and work with the Brokerage Service (Placements) and the Fostering Service to Family find appropriate provision to meet long term placements needs and with Adult Services where appropriate for those children with long term defined needs.

3.5 Fostering Service

3.5.1 Assessment and Permanency Team (Family and Friends Team) Placement of children and young people in approved foster placements or alternative family arrangements

The Fostering Team has a dedicated team which lead and support specific aspects of permanency.

The focus of this team is to support permanency for children and young people who may become looked after or are already looked after. The team undertakes the following assessments to achieve permanency within the wider family or families own network working in conjunction with the child’s Social Worker. The team undertakes the following assessments to achieve Permanency within the child’s family or wider network:

- The team undertakes Viability Assessments and Connected person/Family and Friends Assessments (Form C) for prospective family and friends carers. If carers are approved the children's and young people's placements become subject to Fostering National Minimum Standards, regulations and Schedules.
- The team supervise and support Connected Person/Family and Friends approved foster carers.
- Where the child's or young person's placement is stable and the care plan is to progress towards Special Guardianship to achieve permanence with the child/ren or young person's Connected Person /Family and Friends carer. Our policy is that we will review the placement 9 months after the carers' approval, to progress this plan the carer will need to inform the local authority of their intention to apply for a Special Guardianship. The assessment will then commence towards obtaining this order.
- The team completes the Special Guardianship Assessment when this is an alternative to care for children and young people where there is an existing relationship with the proposed foster carer (mainstream or Connected Person/Family and Friends) where the care plan is to proceed to Special Guardianship and the carers wish to apply.
- The team undertakes the Form F Assessments for a range of prospective individuals who wish to become approved mainstream foster carers,
- This team has specific dedicated support officers, who support and review family and friends carers who are for children and young people within Private Fostering arrangements or are subject to Special Guardianship Orders. The support officers undertake Special Guardianship Reviews.
- Private Fostering- the team will undertake the Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment record and visits under Regulation 8. Where private fostering arrangements become more enduring, the team will convene a case discussion meeting to explore the options for permanence. If the child or young person is unlikely to return home, for example- Children Arrangements order or Special Guardianship Order.

This team has a significant role in leading on permanency and contributing to the Permanency Panel; furthermore strategic tracking of children who require permanency and contributing to the Permanency Panel, Fostering Panel, Care Proceedings (assessment of family and friends) both pre proceedings and during proceedings. They will complete Viability and Form C Connected Person Assessments, Form F Assessments in order to make recommendations on the suitability of applicants to become mainstream foster carers. The team is responsible for supervision and support of approved Family and Friends /connected person foster carers and assessment and support of Private Fostering Arrangements.

3.5.2 Family Finding & Targeted Services Team

Recruitment, Assessment, training and support of approved Foster Carers to meet our placement sufficiency needs and placement choice to achieve Permanency.

- This service focuses upon the recruitment of Foster Carers to meet a range of needs for children and young people in need of long term family placements - permanence.
- Their focus is to recruit, identify suitable appropriate foster placements and hold the specific lead on matching children and young people to suitable, respite, short term, and long term family placements within internal fostering and external fostering provision. They will work closely with practitioners, operational managers and independent reviewing officers to identify substitute carers who can be matched with the child or young person.
- The team work closely with Brokerage and children and young people to identify and explore matching options, support needs with internal or external foster carers for children in need of a range of foster placements.
- The team works closely with the Commissioning Lead Officer for children's services to develop placement sufficiency objectives for foster placements. They will develop training to support Telford & Wrekin's own foster carers to support placement stability and achieve permanence.
- This team contributes to the Telford & Wrekin Placement Sufficiency Strategy, recruitment, approval, training and support and the placement of children and young people with Telford & Wrekin's own foster carers.

3.5.3 Mainstream Fostering Team

- The focus of this team involves the supervision and support of children and young people in care placed within Telford & Wrekin's own fostering provision. (Mainstream and connected persons carers).
- The service supports the identification of foster placements for new and existing children and young people in need of permanence in long term fostering or where regular shared care/respite is required to maintain children and young people with their long term substitute carers.
- The service provides supervision and support to Foster Carers within internal foster placements where the plan for the child or young person is respite care, shared care, return home, adoption and permanency in relation to long term fostering (mainstream & connected persons carers).
- The service is responsible for the approval and review of foster carers.

- This team is responsible for Telford & Wrekin Fostering Panel and has a critical role in supporting placement stability for children and young people, where their care plans are related to a range of permanency options and in particular long term fostering.
- The teams' role in placement stability with internal Foster Carers is significant in the training, development, supervision and support of foster carers to achieve stability. Thus supporting the consideration by foster carers in providing long term placements for children and young people where the alternative options for permanence are not appropriate.

3.6 Parenting & Assessment Team

- Parenting Assessments are undertaken by the Parenting Assessment team where children are deemed in need of support, in need of protection, where working is being completed under the Public Law Outline or where care proceedings have been issued and the Court directs a parenting assessment. The Parenting Assessment Team is also responsible for undertaking pre-birth assessments where the criteria for such assessment is met at the point of referral. Where there is a plan for children in care to be placed with their parents – Placement with Parents policies and Procedures must be followed by Social workers and their managers to assess, and obtain authorisation from the Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding and Specialist Services.

3.7 The Joint Adoption Service

- The Joint Adoption Service partnership between Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire County Council, who lead on the recruitment, identification, matching, supervision support of foster to adopt placements, private law adoption, adoption support and review,
- The Joint Adoption Service works with all services for children in care to achieve permanency where the care plan for the child is that of adoption.
- The Adoption Service has a dedicated lead Social Worker responsible for supporting Social Workers to family find for Adoptive Placements.
- The Joint Adoption Service works closely with our service teams and provides training and support to teams and support groups for Adopters.
- The Adoption Panel receives reports from the Adoptions Service for children who require Adoptive Placements, and considers and approves long term matches.
- The team supports Social Workers to find suitable adopters. They lead on finding suitable adopters and matching children with suitable adopters, supervise and support

adopters, provide additional resources if assessed as required to meet the needs of the child or young person.

- The team also undertakes National Adoption searches, consideration and written consent of the Resources Allocation Panel is required prior to the service undertaking a National Search.
- Where additional financial support is required the Joint Adoption Social Worker and the child's Social Worker will need to approach the Resources Allocation Panel for consideration and consent.

3.8 Independent Conference & Reviewing Team

The role of Independent Reviewing Officer, the Annual Foster Home Reviewing Officer the Children's Rights & Representation service.

The Independent Conference & Reviewing Team has a central and critical role in supporting the achievement of permanency for children on the edge of care (via child protection planning) and children and young people in care or leaving care (via Independent Reviewing Officer roles).

- **Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)** have a pivotal role in supporting the achievement of Permanency Plans for all looked after children by ensuring permanency plans are in place by the child/young person's 2nd statutory review and by undertaking their statutory responsibilities to:
 - Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case
 - Participate in any review of the child's case
 - Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority

IROs, are able to use their role to support children and young people, their families, Social Workers and their managers to stimulate engagement and activities through the exploration of care planning for permanency at initial LAC reviews through to 2nd LAC Reviews. They will be able to offer oversight on data performance of the achievement of permanency plans by 2nd LAC Review. IRO's will be able to offer facilitative supportive discussions in the achievement of firm permanency plans where there are potential or actual barriers.

3.8.1 The Annual Foster Home Reviewing Officer is located within the Independent Conference & Reviewing Team and provides further oversight in achieving permanency for children and young people placed with Telford & Wrekin's own Foster Carers. They are in a unique position to provide feedback on matching, Foster Carers formal terms of approval, identifying and how Foster Carers may be supported through their training and supervision to achieve permanency.

3.8.2 The Children's Rights & Representations Team provides independent advocacy for children and young people in care concerning their care plans and to those who are subject to child protection processes. Children and young people will be able to seek advice, gain support to make representations and or complaints if there are concerns about their plans for permanency.

3.8.3 Service Quality & Audit

Early Help & Children's Safeguarding and Specialist services has a separate quality assurance framework, outlining our:

- Standards, Values and principles
- What this means in practice for work with Children, Young people and families.
- Professional behaviours
- Quality assurance framework
- Implementation of our service quality standards

We have a specific quality assurance schedule to support our development and improvement in establishing permanency for children, young people and their families.

3.9 Corporate Parenting

Reports to our Corporate Parenting multi-agency group will contain information and data concerning our achievement of Permanency for our children in care as part of the performance dataset to this group.

3.10 Commissioning and contracting to achieve permanence

Our Commissioning team will lead on the placement sufficiency for children in our care and will provide a needs analysis and commissioning plan. This will be reviewed annually incorporating commissioning requirements and activity to support permanence for children in care.

3.11 North Midlands Adoption and Permanency partnership

Telford & Wrekin, together with Shropshire County Council Children's Services, Staffordshire Children's Services and Stoke on Trent Children Service are joint partners in the development of a Regional Adoption.

This North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership is seeking to deliver a Regionalisation of Adoption Programme which goes well beyond Adoption and focuses on Permanency (including Fostering, Special Guardianship and Connected Persons). The partnership is seeking to deliver holistic improvements to the outcomes of our children who require permanency; through an iterative and incremental change management approach that offers best value. Our approach seeks to focus on “function” before “form”.

Partnership activity will be focused on the development and formation of a “Permanency Model” where the Local Authorities of the partnership adopt consistent approaches to shared values, systems, and operational delivery, demand management, quality, performance management, and governance, styles of leadership, integrated working, finance and sustainability. The partnership will be seeking to develop a consistent Child’s Journey with shared Delivery Structures and Processes across the region.”

It is envisaged that our partnership will to achieve:

- Improved sufficiency of Adopters, and long term Foster Carers and specialist Adopters and Foster Carers for children and young people with additional needs, share local needs data for each Local Authority in the partnership on an annual basis.
- Joint recruitment campaigns to attract carers who can meet the permanency needs for our children and young people in care across our region/ partnership.
- Develop training to support assessment skills, prospective carer preparation for Adoption, Special Guardianship and long term Fostering.
- Use consistent assessment tools, documentation and forums to progress permanency.
- Develop agreed data set to capture individual authority and regional performance relation to permanency.
- Use the partnership as a placement resource to identify and place children and young people.