

7. PERMANENCE PLANNING – NEW POLICY AND PROCEDURES

PURPOSE

A new Permanency Policy and Procedure document provides guidance to social work staff involved in planning permanence for children and young people in care who are unable, or who may be unable, to return to live their birth parents. It is important that colleagues in health and education services are aware and able to support this policy. Consideration about permanence and the best outcomes for children and young people must be kept in mind at the start of a child's journey and best practice principles must underpin any professional interventions. This Management Guidance Note introduces the Policy and Procedure, and provides guidance on associated forms and templates.

Permanence Planning

The primary aim of permanence planning is to ensure that all children and young people in care are provided with care arrangements that deliver continuity, consistency and security of care and support which positively promote their attachment to parents, carers and adopters and an individual sense of security, self-esteem and identity. Permanence planning for children in care and those on the edge of care is based on an awareness of children's need to form and maintain emotional bonds with adults who can meet their needs (including their age and development stage) on a long-term and predictable basis throughout their minority and beyond.

Timescales

- Usually 3 months and no more than six months for Pre-proceedings Public Law Outline (PLO) procedures to conclude.
- No more than twenty-six weeks for Care Proceedings to conclude
- For all children placed in care under an interim care order or section 20 (Children Act 1989) a permanence plan should be established prior to the second statutory review and confirmed within a further 6 months.

Preferred routes to permanence

Reunification- returning home

The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need, to support the staying together. Staying at home offers the best chance of stability. This however must be balanced against the risk of harm to the child. If a child has been removed, every effort needs to be made for the child or young person to be reunified with their birth family. Again, this must be balanced against any possible risk of further harm to the child or young person.

Placement with Family or Friends

If the child or young person cannot be returned to their birth parent(s), every effort must be made to secure a placement with a family member or friend as their carer, provided it is safe to do so. A Family Group Conference (FGC) should take place at the earliest opportunity to identify whether anyone in the network may be able to provide secure and stable care based on the child's needs.

Child Arrangement Orders

These orders decide who the child is to live with and/or who the child will spend time with, and can be granted to more than one person whether they live together or not. If a Child Arrangements Order states that the child will live with a person, that person will have parental responsibility for that child until the order ceases. Contact with a child can either be direct e.g. fact to face meetings, or indirect e.g. by letter or exchange of cards.

Long term (permanent)fostering

A long term fostering arrangement can be with a family member or friend (connected person) who has been approved as a foster carer for a specific child or with an in-house or independent fostering agency carer.

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This option has proved to be particularly successful for older children who have retained strong links to their birth families, and where the foster carers wish for the continued involvement of the Local Authority.

Special Guardianship

A Special Guardianship Order should be considered for children who require permanent stability and security, but not the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption. It can also provide an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

Adoption

Adoption transfers parental responsibility from the birth parents and others, including the Local Authority, permanently and solely to the adopter.

Three steps to achieving a Permanence Plan

- Family Group Conference
- Initial and Review Case Permanence Planning Meetings
(Please read new Permanence Planning Meeting (PPM) terms of reference and use the new template for recording)
- Permanence Panel and Tracking Meetings
(See more information on the PP and tracking meetings, with planned meeting dates)

Permanence Planning meetings will consider the following areas:

- Background of the Child(ren)
- Current Legal Context
- Current Assessment in Progress with Probable Outcome
- Child(ren)'s Health
- Child(ren)'s Education / Geographical Needs
- Child(ren)'s Wishes / Feelings
- Views of Parents / Other Significant Adults
- Discussions of Relevant Options / Likely Outcomes

A child's case is considered at the Permanence Panel and Tracking Panel within 6-8 weeks of them entering Local Authority Care and then reviewed at regular intervals, (frequency being based on the care plan for the child and court timescale) until the child's permanent placement is secured. The Permanence Panel and Tracking Meeting will support the Social Worker in considering the permanence options available and offer advice and guidance as to the actions required to achieve this. It will monitor the progress of the plan, including the use of Family Group Conferences and provide advice when the plan needs to be amended. It will challenge delay, escalating this when appropriate.

Please read the new Permanence Planning Policy and Procedures, alongside Permanence Planning Guidance and associated links on Tri.X. The new procedure begins 6th March 2018, and introduces: *Initial / Review Permanence Planning Meetings and Review Permanence Planning Meetings*; A new Referral to the Permanence Planning and Tracking Meeting form; a *Permanence Planning Flowchart and Guidance*.

or

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Owner	Jean Imray, Service Director
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