



BEST CARE PANEL

TERMS OF REFERENCE

August 2017

Introduction

A happy, stable home life is fundamental to the successful development of all children and for children in care a successful placement is the most important factor in enabling them to flourish. The Children's Act (1989) requires local authorities to ensure that a child is given the type of placement that best meets their needs, regardless of cost.

Not all children are in placements which meet their needs and many are moved between placements far too frequently. We need to improve children's experience of placements, responding directly to what children themselves have told us is important and putting their views at the heart of placement decisions.

It is the responsibility of Children's Services to ensure, through effective oversight, that children in care and care leavers receive the high-quality care and support that they need to enable them to achieve their aspirations and to meet their wellbeing outcomes. This needs to be done in a cost-effective way and in line with good practice. Which means:

- Good on-going assessment that analyses and prioritises needs leading to clearly defined child focused outcomes.
- Effective care planning processes that clearly state how the child's outcomes are to be achieved and who is to support the plan.
- Innovative models of service provision that lead as soon as possible to clarity around permanency.

Principles of good decision-making

Placement choices should be based on good care planning designed to best meet the child's needs.

Effective commissioning based on good assessments of children's needs and information on the demand for and costs of care for them could lead to better outcomes for the children and for society. Ultimately, this will lead to better value for the taxpayer.

Placing children in internal foster care placements or internal residential services should occur in the first instance unless there is evidence that it is not in the interest of the child.

Children should be placed in the right placement first time and close to home. The use of internal foster care or residential care will be considered first as the child should stay within the same locality. Where there is evidence that the needs of the child cannot be met by internal provision or there are safety reasons that suggests the child may need to be outside the immediate area an external provision will be explored. The placement decision should primarily be based on the child's current and future needs.

The provision of care for children and young people takes account of their needs and preferences and promotes long term stability.

Decisions about placements should be made with an expectation that placement changes or emergency placements are avoided. The carers of children in care have children and young people placed with them who have been matched to the placement to take account of their needs and preferences. Any reasons why the wishes of the children and young people cannot be followed should be clearly explained and documented.

Purpose and Role of the Panel

To support, facilitate and scrutinise the progression of the care plan or pathway plan.

Panel will expect the lead professional presenting a case to know the **child's journey** well and verbally present the journey in a succinct way, bringing the panel members up-to-date with the latest care plan or pathway plan and including the child's view, the parents and carers view and best value options for meeting the requirements within the care plan or pathway plan. This may include;

- Staying Put with foster carers post 18;
- Transition from Regulation 24 (family/ friend care arrangements) to Special Guardianship- creative ideas to support permanency arrangements;
- Special Guardianship arrangements and requests for a Special Guardian allowance if the financial assessment has been completed;
- Transition accommodation for care leavers;
- Reunification to parental care;
- Potential or actual request for placement moves.

The Panel will consider:

Care Planning

- Support the social work manager to enable social workers to prioritise good-quality practice and effective service delivery when formulating the child's care plan or pathway plan. Provide additional/analytical thinking which lead to plans that are SMART, child focused, based on identified needs and focus on outcomes.

Permanence Planning

- The panel can support the social work manager on the formation of the proposed permanence plan prior to the 2nd LAC Review where this plan is agreed. In some cases, the panel can ratify the recommendations proposed within the permanence plan so that it can be implemented immediately following agreement at the LAC Review.
- Children and young people who remain in the care of the Local Authority should have their needs assessment updated yearly to mirror the changes in their development. If there has been any significant change the case should be presented to Best Care Panel to consider continued suitability of the care plan.

- Each young person reaching their 17th birthday to ensure pathway and independence plans are in place for a smooth transition into adulthood (including children with to be referred to TOG)
- Permanence does not mean that a child or young person should remain looked after throughout their formative years. Social Workers and team managers will be expected to provide an update of contact, family position and change and long term commitment to the child. This is vital for a Child's sense of belonging.
- Where the social worker experiences barriers to the meeting of the permanence plan, (incorporated within the care plan from the child's second LAC Review or subsequent up dated care plans) the panel can be asked to seek solutions or suggest different approaches, using the range of expertise within the panel.

Placement disruption

- Stability Meetings are rarely due to one factor or individual. It is important that all the information available is considered in a balanced way, without apportioning blame. Should there be some learning following both stability and disruption meetings the Panel can be asked to review the development of events and seek ways to avoid the issue reoccurring.

Membership

The Panel membership will be:

- LAC Service Manager (Chair)
- Quality and Assurance Service Manager / Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager
- Fostering and Placements Team Manager
- Looked After Children (LAC) Team Manager
- 16+ Leaving Care Team Manager
- Aspire Adoption Team Manager
- Access to Resources Team Manager
- Virtual School Head for LAC
- LAC Nurse

For individual children when discussed (as appropriate)

- Social Worker for the child
- Team Manager or Practice Manager for the child
- Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), however this is not essential

Quorum

For the meeting to be quorate for each child discussed representation must include:

1. An experienced operational Service Manager who can make decisions where required.
2. A lead professional who knows the child, is aware of the child's care plan or pathway plan and can represent the child's views and involvement and that planning

3. A person who represents the IRO service who is aware of the child's care plan or pathway plan.
4. A person who represents the Virtual School who is aware of the child's PEP and educational requirements within the care plan or pathway plan and Education and Health Care (EHC) Plan where required.
5. The Team Manager or Practice Manager from the team for which the child's case is open.
6. A Team Manager or Practice Manager from the Fostering Team or Residential provision, if this applies in the child's circumstances.
7. A Team Manager or Practice Manager from ART to offer a commissioning perspective.

Referral Process

See Pathways, Referral Form and Schedule of Dates

Appendix 1 – Best Care Panel Referral Pathway

Appendix 2 – Best Care Panel Referral Form

Appendix 3 – Best Care Panel Schedule of Dates

Appendix 4 – Best Care Panel 18+ Cohort Schedule of Dates

Frequency

For children under 18 the panel will be held fortnightly. The panel may call for additional meetings in special circumstances. The 18+ Panel will be held every 6 weeks.

The agenda will be distributed within a minimum of two working days to allow for preparation for the panel. The social work referral and papers for panel will be distributed with the agenda.

Its recommended that Social Workers and their Team Managers take steps to block out dates in their diary to assist with attendance.

Governance

Notes from the meeting will be distributed within 3 working days. Where discussions relate to specific children it is the responsibility of the child's social worker to ensure that a note of the discussion is placed on the child's electronic record.

Membership and Chairperson responsibilities will be reviewed regularly and as a minimum annually.

Terms of Reference will be reviewed regularly and as a minimum annually.

The performance of the panel and any recommendations to improve the quality of the services provided by the Borough are reported to the CSC Quarterly Performance Meeting by the chair of the panel.

Reviewed August 2017

Next review August 2018